

Gabriele Marranci

Faith, Ideology and Fear

Muslim Identities Within
and Beyond Prisons

Continuum Religious Studies



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Note

¹ Invited Lectures and Conferences: Divinity School at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, 23 February 2006: 'Muslims in Prison in Scotland'; IQRA Annual Lecture presented at the UK House of Lords, 26 June 2007: 'Faith, Ideology and Fear: The Case of Current and Former Muslim Prisoners'; Hofstra University Department of Anthropology, 27 November 2007, paper: 'Looking for Dignity: Young Muslims between Western Dystopias and Islamic Utopias'; University of Glasgow and The European Probation Organisation, 25–26 April 2008, paper: 'Lost in Transition – The Case of the Muslim Former Prisoner in the UK'; SAASS/SCCJR Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Applied Social Sciences at Glasgow University, 17 October 2007, paper: 'Ideology as Common Sense: The Experience of Current and Former Muslim Prisoners'.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

During one of my visits to a mosque, while waiting to meet the imam for an interview, I sat in a corner on the carpeted floor of the main prayer room. On my left, with a Qur'an in his lap, sat a man named Abul¹ with whom I engaged in general conversation until the time of prayer arrived. Normally, before the prayer, the worshippers tend to situate themselves towards the front of the hall, filling each row and closing spaces between people as they move.² The worshippers even make gestures of invitation to those behind to join the incomplete row. I have observed this process many times in mosques of various kinds and differing affiliations to Muslim schools of thought.³ To my surprise, Abul never attempted to fill any space in the rows before him. Instead, I had the impression that he preferred very much to remain behind. Indeed, his efforts were so successful that Abul stood alone behind the last complete row of worshippers. The prayer soon finished, and as usual, people exchanged greetings and shook hands, even with those whom they had met for the first time. However, nobody approached Abul. He returned to his corner, sat alone and read his Qur'an.

Although unusual, this would not have particularly attracted my attention were it not for an elderly worshipper who approached me and took me aside. Upon reaching a distance that presumably he thought would prevent Abul from overhearing us, he took my right arm with his hand and whispered close,

Stay away from him. He is not a good brother. He has been in prison and we hope that he'll go somewhere else for his prayers. Those like him do not change: they say that they've changed but they don't. We are honest Muslims and we do not want trouble, especially with the police. Take care, and do not speak or sit near to him – or you could be in trouble. Those like him are bad Muslims: there is nothing to learn from them other than bad things and sins.

He left as abruptly as he had approached and without another word. Abul had not overheard us, but he had seen us. He looked at me and I could see in his eyes that he knew precisely what had happened. This was probably not something new to him; it was likely that many others had been made aware that Abul was a former prisoner in this same way. Unsmilingly, Abul resumed reading the Qur'an with a slight, nearly imperceptible, back and forth rhythmic movement.

Abul's experience of isolation intrigued me. In that exact moment I found myself committed to a profoundly intense and demanding (both physically and psychologically) research that would go on to absorb more than 4 years of my academic life as well as much of my private life. It was November 2003 when, in Scotland, Abul became the first respondent in my investigation of the experience of prison, life after prison and the challenges that these Muslims face, not only from mainstream society but also from their own communities.

After the case of Richard Reid, who allegedly converted to Islam while at Feltham Young Offenders' Institution in West London and then tried to blow up a plane in December 2001 by means of a bomb concealed in his shoe, there has been an increasing, and nearly morbid, interest in Muslim prisoners. Coinciding with this growing attention has been an alarmist mass media message that prisons in the United Kingdom are becoming training camps for future terrorists. During the 1990s, however, it was difficult to trace any real interest in the 'faith' of Muslim prisoners, and so they remained just that – ordinary prisoners who often had less facilities to practise their religion than their Christian fellow-inmates (Beckford and Gilliat 1998). If some rare discussion could be read, it would be found within the records of the British Parliament and House of Lords rather than on the pages of newspapers. In fact, some Lords and parliamentarians did raise concerns during those years about the treatment of Muslim prisoners and the provisions for their religious needs, which were part of those Human Rights that the Parliament had endorsed. Finally, on 30 March 2000, The Lord Bishop of Bradford was able to announce, 'I welcome the appointment of Maqsood Ahmed as the new Muslim adviser to prisons' and challenge whether the increase of Muslim prisoners should be linked to poverty, lack of education and social problems.⁴ The introduction of a Muslim adviser to the English and Welsh Prison Service marked an important step towards a centralised control over the provision of religious 'pastoral care' to Muslim prisoners. Even though I have not the space here to discuss the history of the prison chaplaincy and its development,⁵ it is worth mentioning that before the year 2000 the individual prison establishments had to

provide, where required, such services and this was mainly organised through Muslim volunteers or local imams. Any adult Muslim man can be an imam and lead the prayers on Friday, and before 9/11, many establishments did not ask for particular security checks. It is important to highlight this fact as it partially explains the reason behind the Prison Service's concerns and the mass media's frequent panic about the possibility of prison imams radicalising Muslim prisoners. Having no central knowledge of who was preaching to the Muslim prisoners increased the suspicion surrounding the figure of the prison imam, who was already barely tolerated within prisons (Beckford and Gilliat 1998). The increasing awareness that the number of Muslim prisoners could only grow and the introduction of new antiterrorist legislation (which may increase the numbers of those convicted of, or on remand for, terrorism related offences) facilitated the development of the 'Muslim chaplaincy'.⁶

In 2007, the Prison Service in England and Wales employed 34 full-time and 15 part-time 'Muslim chaplains' who, however, had to care, at that time, for about 8,789 Muslim inmates.⁷ Also, specific Muslim organisations formed to provide assistance, often in the form of information, visits and support to the Muslim prisoners and to efficiently train a new generation of professional Muslim imams (El-Hassan 2002; Beckford and Gilliat 1998; Bajwa 2007). However, the 7/7 London terrorist attack and the failed attempt on 21/7, together with a series of uncovered plots across the United Kingdom, have refocused attention to the theme 'terrorism, radicalisation and prison'. This has been also reinforced by the fact that Mukhtar Said Ibrahim, a former young offender (who was supposedly radicalised while being incarcerated at Feltham Young Offenders' Institute), was among the four individuals involved in the failed 21/7 attack in London (Radcliffe 2008). As we shall see throughout this book, while concern about the radicalisation of Muslim prisoners has increased, no real attention has been paid to the problems and risks that former Muslim prisoners (especially when young) face both within their communities and the wider society.

Muslims in Prison: Wannabe Terrorists?

As on 26 June 2008, prisons in England and Wales detained 9,496 Muslim prisoners, of which 23 per cent were on remand. This means that Muslims account for about 11 per cent of the overall prison population (82,319), but are only 2.8 per cent of the general UK population (Census 2001). There are nearly four times as many Muslims incarcerated as there would

be if the prisoners proportionally reflected the overall Muslim population. In Scotland, Muslim prisoners represent 1.7 per cent of the overall Scottish prison population (7,205), but Muslims account for less than 0.8 per cent of the total population. Although I will provide some in-depth statistical analysis in Chapter 3, it is worth mentioning that, for the past 11 years, the Muslim population detained in UK prisons has seen an extraordinary increase of 141 per cent (in 1997, the Muslim prison population in the United Kingdom was about 3,681). Of course, it is essential that we read this data, as well as the statistics discussed in Chapter 3, with an awareness that the United Kingdom had an average of 146 prisoners per 100,000 population in 2007, which is the second highest rate in Western Europe. As discussed in Chapter 3, criminologists have clearly linked high incarceration rates to social and economic disadvantages. The Census 2001 has revealed the extent to which Muslim communities in the United Kingdom have been economically and socially left behind (Dobbs et al. 2006) as well as the disadvantaged conditions that many British born Muslims, of various ethnic backgrounds, face today.

Notwithstanding this dramatic reality that certainly increases the number of Muslims from various ethnic backgrounds entering prison,⁸ the mass media have rarely mentioned it. Rather, newspapers and TV programmes have decontextualised the pre-incarceration lives of Muslim prisoners, their differences, their crimes and their religious (or non-religious) experiences within and outside prison, to instead offer an alarmist, stereotyped, picture of Muslim prisoners as a threat to our security. Titles such as ‘Our prisons are fertile ground for cultivating suicide bombers’,⁹ ‘Al-Qaeda bid to recruit inmates’,¹⁰ ‘Terrorists jailed in UK prisons “to rise tenfold”’¹¹ or ‘Muslim gangs “are taking control of prison”’¹² have created a powerful collective imagination of ‘prison’ as a den of ‘wannabe’ jihadis.

These misrepresentations are credible to the public because very few people have ever had any experience of prison, visited one or met a Muslim former prisoner. The mass media’s rhetoric, which can induce one to conclude that prison harbours the most numerous, trained, ideologically committed and ready-to-die Al-Qaeda cells, has certainly influenced not only ordinary readers but also politicians, ministers and, as we shall see, even academics. This is so much the case that Ms Sturt, the governor of Belmarsh, felt the need, as part of an examination of witnesses for the Select Committee on Home Affairs inquiring into the extension of the 28-day period of detention without trial, to emphasise,¹³

I would be very reluctant to see Muslim prisoners as a group. We have many Muslim prisoners. I have, I think at the last count, 188 Muslim

prisoners. The great majority of my Muslim prisoners have nothing whatsoever to do with Islamist extremism or terrorism, they are just people who are on criminal charges who happen to be Muslim, and it is very important for their well-being and for the health of the organisation that we do not allow ourselves to go into the shorthand of thinking that Muslim equals extremist, because that would be quite wrong.

Governor Sturt's remarks, as we shall discuss in this book, are perfectly right. Muslim prisoners are ordinary people committed to prison for ordinary crimes, which are similar to those of non-Muslim prisoners coming from the same social and economic conditions. Therefore, since the most common crime among British young people is 'violence against the person' (about 20 per cent of the prison population), it is not surprising that about the same proportion (21 per cent) of Muslim prisoners have been convicted for such a crime¹⁴ It is also relevant to highlight that only 1 per cent of all Muslims in prison (both on remand and sentenced) are detained for terrorism related crimes (including cyber crimes), and all of them are under strict surveillance in a few high-security prisons. Nonetheless, from the press to the Parliament, the idea that Muslim prisoners are radicalising through reading material, imams, contact with external visitors and 'the terrorists' is increasingly widespread. Thus, in newspapers, we may periodically come across sentences such as, 'The officers believe that attempts have been made to convert one in 10 of the estimated 8,000 Muslims in the eight high-security prisons in England and Wales to the Al-Qaeda cause in the past two years',¹⁵ or, 'There are also emerging concerns about how terrorists impact on the existing gang culture within the high-security estate and how terrorists may be forging connections with existing gangs.'¹⁶

However, during the examination of witnesses for the Select Committee on Home Affairs, we can read the statement of the Director General of the Prison Service, Mr Wheatley, replying to a question of how much evidence he had of radicalisation in prisons among prisoners serving sentences, on remand for terrorist offences or otherwise, 'It would be wrong to get into the detail of individual cases. We have not at the moment seen much clear evidence that we have radicalisation going on in prison. We think that it is possible that will happen . . .'.¹⁷ If the Director General of the Prison Service could confidently make such a statement after Extremist Monitoring Units [EMU] were developed within prisons, and coordinated by the Prison Service through the Extremist Policy Unit, we may ask from where the newspapers collected their alarmist information.

During my research, it became clear that many of these dramatic tales came from prison officers' anecdotal stories, often made public through

the Prison Officers' Association (POA). Perhaps unsurprisingly, many prison officers show a degree of resentment towards the changes that were introduced to manage the new challenges that the increase of ethnic minorities in prison – and consequently of Muslim prisoners – presents. However, as we also discuss briefly in Chapter 4, although I have met very professional prison officers and some who are devoted beyond the call of duty to the welfare of the prisoners, I cannot deny that there is a certain widespread culture of intolerance and institutional racism towards Muslims, as there was against Black and Asian prisoners before 9/11. So, some of the anecdotes I received while entering a particular prison resulted after a very simple verification to be fully false but powerful enough to create tension between Muslims and non-Muslims within the prison. Some of these attempts succeeded in making prison an even more dangerous place for Muslims, as it has proven to be in the recent past.¹⁸ Certainly, the fact that new non-Muslim prisoners are often 'informed' that they risk to be victims of 'the Muslims' does not help to maintain a secure establishment.¹⁹ I had the impression that the Prison Officers' Association used the controversy surrounding Muslim prisoners to increase political and contractual pressure on the Prison Service. However, there are increasing numbers of prison officers who genuinely believe to be 'defending' the country against terrorists and, as one clearly stated, 'Islamic attempts to destroy our civilisation'.

Journalists, prison officers and politicians are not the only ones interested in the reasons for such a surprising increase of Muslims in prison, who are ever more often referred to as 'Muslim criminals'. Academics, although very recently, in the field of criminology (Spalek 2002; Quraishi 2005; Spalek et al. 2008), sociology (Macey 2002) and religious studies (Beckford and Gilliat 1998; Gilliat 2008), security studies, and more rarely, anthropology (Alexander 2000, 2004) have attempted to make sense of this phenomenon. We will discuss some of the available literature in Chapter 2 of this book. One of the main aspects that we need to address is the shift in focus from ethnicity to religion, which has characterised the social scientific study of crime among Muslims, after the ethnic riots that have affected England, particularly Bradford, in 1995 and 2001 (Amin 2003). If previous studies, such as Mawby and Batta (1980), depicted an Asian community as mainly law abiding and with a low crime rate, the studies published at the end of the 1990s (Macey 1999a, 1999b; Alexander 2000) provide a picture of young Pakistani and Bangladeshi people as affected by social problems and 'gang culture'. As Alexander (2000, 2004) has rightly argued, some studies, instead of providing an analysis of the socio-economic conditions and environmental challenges these young people had to face, tried to

‘discover’ the ‘culprit’. Spalek (2002) has invited scholars to carefully consider the possible role that religion may have in criminal behaviour. In Chapter 2, we shall see that such an invitation, even when the intention is noble as in Spalek’s case, can lead to pernicious essentialism – as Macey’s recent controversial studies (2002, 2007) may show.

Although religion plays a role in the rhetoric of some Muslim prisoners and former prisoners, I have argued that identifying the practise of a religion, in this case Islam, as the main factor of increasing criminality among Pakistani, Bangladeshi and other ethnic groups is a misleading and dangerous essentialism (see also Marranci 2008b, 2009). The main risk of these studies, which are mainly based on culturalist approaches and very much simplified versions of ‘identity theories’ (see Chapter 5), is to end in reinforcing stereotypes. In addition, instead of producing useful analysis, they often espouse what Mamdani has defined as ‘Culture Talk’ (Mamdani 2004), in which ‘every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of the essence’ (2004: 18).

During my research, I realised that to avoid such essentialism and to have a clear picture beyond the stereotypes of prison, I needed, as we shall see in Chapter 3, to engage with these Muslims both during and after their custodial sentences. It was important to observe their lives and discuss with them their experiences of incarceration and the impact that it had on them, not as Muslims, or even Pakistanis, Arabs, Bangladeshis, White converts, British and African-Caribbean people among others, but rather simply as humans. This allowed me to understand the relationship between crime and environment, and also the effect of a large generation gap. Indeed, we shall see that much of the political, yet also scholarly (Pauly 2004; Brighton 2007; Abbas 2007), debate concerning the ‘criminal behaviour’ of second-generation ethnic minorities, especially when Muslim, suggests that a lack of integration is one of the most relevant factors contributing to it. However, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, many scholars, partially following political discourse, have understood ‘integration’ in an Andersonian (Anderson 1991) abstract dimension of national community. Conversely, I shall suggest that people of any ethnic minority origin, as any other person, integrate into the local, and even the micro-local, dimensions of everyday life in the precise location in which they are situated. We will see, through an analysis of the Census 2001 (of England, Wales and Scotland), that young Muslims are often not integrating into the best neighbourhoods of the country, but rather into areas that are among the worst affected by social dysfunction and crime. Consequently, if we consider that only 130 individuals have been incarcerated for terrorism related offences, then the great

majority of Muslims enter prison for crimes that are very similar in nature, and also in number, to those committed by non-Muslim Whites in similarly deprived areas.

Crime and criminal behaviour are complex phenomena with many contributing variables. Certainly, only individuals, and not their religions, can make the decision to commit a crime. To blame Islam, or any other religion, for social phenomena such as crime means to ignore not only the individuals' agency, but also more complex processes, many of which are based on the relationship between us and the environment. In conclusion, it is important to remember that in the following chapters we are not dealing with 'Muslim prisoners', but instead with human beings who were recognised as, or 'felt to be', Muslim (Marranci 2006, 2008b). Also, many of these individuals, as we shall discuss, rediscovered Islam, as either religion or identity or both, through the experience of prison as an emotional place.

The Research Context

Generally, anthropologists may read diverse ethnographies in preparation for their fieldwork to plan their methodologies. This is unfortunately not the case when the fieldwork focuses on Muslims in prison and former Muslim prisoners. Indeed, as we have seen, very few studies in the United Kingdom have addressed such topics, and none of these were conducted by anthropologists. Although different aspects of prison have attracted the attention of other social scientists,²⁰ as Spalek (2002, 2004; see also Quraishi 2007) has emphasised, studies of religion within prison are in general extremely rare. When religion was considered, as in some American studies (cf. Clear and Sumter 2002; Evans et al. 1995; Fernander et al. 2005), the focus was on Christianity. Furthermore, anthropology, compared to sociology, has shown little interest in prison life in general (Rhodes 2001). One of the reasons for this disinterest, as Rhodes has suggested, is that 'most of today's prisons are a far cry from those of the earlier decades of the twentieth century, in which the occasional sociologist could ply his trade remarkably undisturbed. Contemporary penology involves an increasingly managerial and technological orientation, psychologically and sociologically based forms of classification, and tight control over information and access' (2001: 65). Nonetheless, as I have discussed elsewhere (Marranci 2008b), it is also true that anthropologists have only recently shown interest in Muslims living in urban areas and the problems related to it.

My research began in Scotland²¹ with former Muslim prisoners in November 2003, and before I was able to enter the first of six Scottish prison

establishments, it was May 2004.²² Nonetheless, my contact with former Muslim prisoners increased during all these 4 years of research, and in the end a total of 25 former prisoners in Scotland, and 20 in England, were interviewed more than once. With a few of them, as I will later describe, I was able to develop a deeper relationship which allowed me to observe their post-prison lives and the difficulties that they had to face. After having my research authorised by the HM Scottish Prison Service and receiving the support of the prison chaplaincy, which at the time of my research in Scotland included only Christian denominations, I was able to interview 30 Muslim prisoners;²³ 10 Scottish Prison Service (SPS) officers, of whom 6 were Race Relations Managers (RRMs); 2 chaplains (1 Church of Scotland and 1 Roman Catholic); Mr Clive Fairweather, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons from 1994 to October 2002; and Rev. Dr McLellan, current HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in Scotland. The Muslim prisoners, both sentenced and on remand, were aged between 17 and 35 with sentences ranging from 3 years up to life. Most were of second-generation South Asian backgrounds; however, four of my respondents were Muslim prisoners of Scottish White origin who had converted to Islam while serving their sentences. Although Pakistanis and Bangladeshis represented the majority of the Muslim prisoners I interacted with, I also interviewed six Algerians and three Black Africans.

My experience with the SPS was marked by strong collaboration, and I received full support in the majority of prisons I visited and also relative freedom to interact with the prisoners and, even more, with the officers. I have visited some prisons more than once and this has helped to establish a sense of trust over time. The prison officers, as the two chaplains I was in contact with, understood the aims of my research and devoted considerable time to help me to identify, based upon the parameters I had set, possible prisoners to interview. The prisoners, with few exceptions, collaborated actively with the research and even informed some of their fellow inmates so that they could take part in it. In a few Scottish prisons, the Muslim prisoners numbered less than two or three, which naturally increased the sense of isolation they experienced (see Chapter 4).

I was able to organise focus groups in prisons that held more than three Muslim prisoners, and I was allocated a room for this purpose. The location of the room changed from prison to prison: from one room of the chaplaincy, to one of the interview rooms, or from a reading room of the library to an empty cell (which resulted in many jokes with the prisoners and officers since I looked imprisoned myself). Normally, my visits to the Scottish prisons began with an escorted visit of the prison facility (from the kitchen to the gym and the different rows of cells), after which I was located

in one of the places where the interviews were to take place. The degree of collaboration with some of the prisons was such that I often found that the officers had arranged for some small refreshments (often various kinds of sandwiches, coffee, tea and biscuits) for the interviewees and me. Because of the high level of hospitality, I am not surprised that most Muslim prisoners volunteered for the interviews and, in certain prisons, I ended having the entire Muslim population involved. All the interviews and interactions with the prisoners took place without the presence of prison officers, even in the case of focus groups. Nonetheless, I never was at risk or felt threatened. Indeed, assaults on researchers or other non-uniformed visitors are extremely rare (Quraishi 2007; Martin 2002).

While immediate trust and cooperation marked my relationship with the SPS, which enabled me to swiftly start the research within Scottish prisons, the English and Welsh HM Prison Service demonstrated to have a very bureaucratic approach to academic research within prisons (see also Quraishi 2007; Beckford et al. 2005; Beckford and Gilliat 1998). Although I understood that the topic was particularly sensitive in the aftermath of 9/11, some initial attempts to stop the research appeared to be unjustified and difficult to explain since my research in Scotland had been successfully completed the year before. The negotiation of my visits at the national level (which means access to prisons of all categories in all English and Welsh regions) brought me several times to London, where the Prison Service Headquarters are located. These visits became important also for establishing my contacts with organisations such as IQRA Trust, the Al-Khoei foundation, the Muslim Youth Helpline and others that work in one way or another with Muslim prisoners and former prisoners. It also helped me to meet and know former Muslim prisoners in the region.

My visits to English prisons began in July 2005, and I concluded my fieldwork in prison²⁴ in January 2007. During this time, I visited 16 establishments: from Cat D open prisons to high-security establishments, from young offenders' institutions to a women's prison. This has allowed me to interview 100 Muslim prisoners (of whom 20 were women). The majority were South Asians (particularly of second-generation background), followed by Black Africans, African-Caribbeans, Arabs and White British converts. Conversely to my experience in Scotland, my main points of reference in these establishments were the prison chaplaincy and the prison imams, who often organised recurrent visits to a particular prison on my behalf (for more on the role of prison imams in other prison research, see Quraishi 2007). Despite initial difficulties, full collaboration and a high degree of

freedom and participant observation, which I did not expect, eventually characterised my research in English prisons.

Once underway, the research progressed much in the same way as it had done in Scotland, except for the fact that I was able to spend extended periods within high-security establishments, sometimes for up to 10 hours a day.²⁵ In certain prisons with a high number of prisoners, multiple visits were granted.

During my visits, I was allowed to take part in Islamic teachings, Friday prayers and sermons; I also had the opportunity to observe imams' activities and spend time with Muslim prisoners both in their cells and during their association time. Indeed, the fact that I often lacked an 'official' room for interviews, and the fact that the Muslim prisoners were often detained in different wings of the prison, meant that I had to reach the prisoners with the help of the prison imam. I had many occasions to conduct focus groups, repeat interviews with some prisoners and officers, and accept prisoners' 'hospitality' in their cells, where they often offered me some soft drinks or even food. Fortunately I enjoyed very good relationships (with extremely few exceptions) with staff, chaplains and prisoners.

As with my research in Scotland, I mainly used opened-ended interviews, a series of in-depth interviews (see Marshall et al. 1999), and some focus group discussions. Although the interviews were pre-prepared and planned, flexibility was adopted so to investigate particular topics in-depth. English was the main language spoken in all interviews. All the interviewees who volunteered to take part in this research were informed about the aims and scope of it, and the proposed outcome. Certainly, for an anthropologist conducting fieldwork in prison, prisoners are to be considered a very 'vulnerable group' (Gelsthorpe et al. 1999).²⁶ With this in mind, although researchers should grant anonymity and confidentiality, as in any other social scientific research, they should also be aware of existing legislation that can limit such confidentiality (see also Quraishi 2007; Beckford et al. 2005). This means that, while conducting fieldwork in prison, the researcher should be sure to inform the respondents that any criminal activity (or intention) in prison, any activity which may endanger anyone and also any criminal activities that were not previously disclosed, should be reported.²⁷

I fully informed my respondents of these restrictions to their right to confidentiality (prisoners and prison officers alike), but fortunately, during these 4 years of research, I have rarely found myself in such a position. Indeed, in one only instance did I decide to report what a respondent had told me – an incident in which, during an extremely emotional and difficult interview, my respondent had confessed to me that he was planning to take

his own life. I was never asked to disclose any details of what I discussed with my respondents by the police or the Prison Service, despite the fact that I also had contact with prisoners charged with, or sentenced for, terrorism-related crimes.

Conducting anthropological fieldwork in prison, and outside it with former Muslim prisoners, means to be exposed to distressing social, economic and personal tragedies. Emotions run high and to be 'fully' detached is impossible. Prison research is both time consuming and requires considerable psychological adjustments. For someone not familiar with such an environment, spending hours inside a prison can be a difficult test (King 2000). However, month after month, what was at first a mysterious world becomes more familiar and some aspects, such as entering prison and passing through the security checks, even become routine. This is also part of 'learning prison', since routine, waiting, dead time and emptiness are part of prison life, and so important to participant observation. As we shall discuss in this book (Chapter 4), the environment of prison itself is essential for understanding not only the slow everyday life of prisoners, but also the effect that such an environment, through emotions, has on the experience of religion.

Islam in Prison or Prison Islam?

Although my respondents, both inside and outside prison, differed in age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and family background (including Islamic affiliations), they had something in common: before their experience of prison, they did not actively practise Islam and did not consider Islam to be an essential part of their lives. They defined themselves as Muslims primarily because of their family backgrounds. Hence, the great majority of those who declare, upon entering prison, that their faith is Islam have in reality abandoned its practice at some point in their lives; usually in their early teens (see also Chapters 2 and 3). Yet even after a few days of confinement in prison, this majority normally rediscover Islam. I will later explain in detail the process and the consequences of this 'enlightenment' and sudden reconversion to Islam. However, it would be very difficult to fully understand such process if we did not pay close attention to the human experience of entering prison and the impact that the prison environment has on the individual. For this reason, in Chapter 4, I will discuss these issues not only from a sociological perspective, but also from a neurocognitive and psychological one.

As we shall discuss in Chapter 4, the narrations I have collected from both former and current Muslim prisoners show an astonishing homogeneity in describing the emotionally powerful experience of incarceration. These descriptions include feelings of fear, wonder, objectification, disorientation, humiliation and claustrophobia that are experienced together with a strong sense of alienation and dreamlike experience. First time prisoners, in particular, use their imagination, which is influenced also by the mass media and Hollywood (Mason 2003), to form expectations about prison. Fear of physical assault, and especially sexual violence, are the norm. Indeed, as also my research has confirmed, violence, in its various forms, and the loss of control over one's life remain among the main anxieties that all prisoners face (Jones and Schmid 2000). Prisoners find themselves severed from their friends and relatives, meaning that they have been forcefully removed from their emotional networks – including partners and children in many cases. They have to cope with an unusual level of emotional deprivation. We shall see how all these events trigger a natural instinct within the prisoners: survival (Toch 1977). Survival in prison is often achieved through strategies. Religion is surely one of those strategies (Greer 2002) for a substantial number of prisoners, and it is so for nearly an entirety of Muslim prisoners.

We shall later observe that even the rituals of Islam and their practice (such as prayers, ablutions, dietary requirements and festivities) acquire an extra layer of meaning (though with some differences in the case of women), which helps the prisoners in their everyday interaction with the prison environment. The more my research progressed, the more it became clear that my respondents did not turn to Islam because of their acquaintance with the Qur'an (in reality, very few could understand it) or any other literature, or because of indoctrination (as many journalists, and even prison officers, believed). Instead, turning to religion, in an environment that imposes an unusual loss of control over one's life, helped them to make sense of their lost freedom. Indeed, an eschatological explanation of their imprisonment and spending what most perceived to be a 'useless life' marked by boredom, helped to fight back nihilism and alienation.

As the reader may expect, Muslim male adults are not the only ones to be detained in prison. Muslim women prisoners are an unfortunate reality that remains completely unstudied, despite representing 3 per cent of all female prisoners. In Chapter 4, although briefly,²⁸ I will provide a glimpse into their life inside. Female Muslim prisoners have, in a majority of cases, dependent children under the age of 18 (Prison Reform Trust 2000). The detachment from their own children and the sense of guilt for being,

as many have said, 'a bad mother', shape how Islam as religion is lived among them. It is thus not surprising that of all reasons for 'rediscovering' or 'reverting' to Islam, the most prominent was to become a good mother; an example for their own children. Although this was commonly the 'official reason', attentive observation offered many other reasons for which Islam was popular among the female prisoners. As I will explain in Chapter 4, Islam becomes for some women a form of 'shield' from difficult realities linked to contradictions between their pre-incarceration days and post-incarceration life. Interestingly enough, a comparative analysis between female Muslim prisoners and male Muslim prisoners revealed some substantial differences. For the women, contrary to the men, there was a general agreement that being a good Muslim while in prison is impossible in reality. Furthermore, the ritualistic aspects of Islam, including Ramadan, had less of an emotional value when compared to the situation I have found in men's prisons. Among women, Islam was clearly used to form in-group communities of support and alliance that helped to protect themselves from the prison environment and minimise dangerous gossip outside the in-group.

Children have not been spared the experience of prison either. Some as young as 12 undertake, once arrested and remanded in custody, the same traumatic journey that adult male and female prisoners do. Of the approximate 12,298 young people in detention today, 13 per cent are Muslim. If a sense of insecurity, fear and preconceptions of prison as a survival-of-the-fittest dungeon of violence affected adult prisoners, it is even stronger among these teenagers (see also Solomon 2003). In many cases, the conditions of young Muslim offenders were more difficult than those of their adult counterparts. Furthermore, these children appeared to be deprived of affection and attention which, to aid a successful rehabilitation, they were in desperate need of. As we shall discuss in Chapter 4, one of the main reasons for which Islam is so popular within young offenders' institutions (despite that most young offenders had long since ceased practising) is that Islam provides a means of connecting with each other and can offer an efficient shield from the psychological suffering of being detached from loved ones. Unfortunately, many young offenders' institutions are inconveniently located in areas outside the city with little or no public transport. This increases the lack of contact with their families. My research has clearly suggested that a lack of substantial contact between young Muslim prisoners and their families, or a total rejection of a young Muslim offender by relatives, facilitates the risk of radicalism. Indeed, as we shall discuss in later chapters, some young Muslim prisoners, affected by both depression and a

lack of contact with family members, even declared that they would be ready to join the ‘mujahidin’ in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

In this book, I will often remind the reader that Muslim prisoners are humans like any others, and as such, they share most of the physical, psychological and environmental effects and disruptions that prison normally induces. Yet there is one aspect that singles out Muslim prisoners and makes them ‘special’ within prisons: an awareness of their being Muslim. Religion in prison has never, before the relatively recent interest in Islam, been so under the spotlight. Despite all the policies and efforts of the Scottish and English and Welsh Prison Services, my research has clearly demonstrated that prisoners and officers alike tend to see the ‘Muslim’ first and the fellow human-being after. I have no qualms to say that prisons in the United Kingdom today risk to become Muslim-centric. Of course, we have seen how the mass media exploit prison stories related to Muslims, and consequently how the Prison Services, especially in England and Wales, attempt to demonstrate to both the public and politicians that they are ‘managing’ the difficult situation. This has undoubtedly increased the surveillance of the general Muslim prison population, thus drawing a great deal of attention to their religion (Spalek et al. 2008).²⁹ This has meant that some officers, especially in some Cat A prisons, visibly or latently read Muslim symbols like the beard, the cap or even attendance at the Friday prayer as a sign of radicalism or even possible terrorist affiliations. As we shall see in this book, Muslim prisoners who have been particularly targeted or bullied because of their ‘Islamic’ appearance or devotion often display strong emotional reactions, expressed through an Islamic rhetoric, against not only the prison but also the state and society.

It is only after an understanding of the socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds of these prisoners, their lives outside prison (Chapter 3) and their experience of prison as human beings who ‘feel to be Muslims’ (Chapter 5, Marranci 2006, 2008b), that we can start to ask: what kind of Islam exists in prison? Prison imams have a fundamental role in helping Muslim prisoners to understand the main tenets of orthodox Islam. However, as we shall consider in Chapters 6 and 7, their roles have strong limitations. Although the Prison Service in Scotland is just beginning to add a Muslim adviser to the prison chaplaincy and the Prison Service of England and Wales have enormously improved the religious provisions for their Muslim prisoners (Gilliat 2008), during my research I have observed that the influence of these measures on how Islam is understood in prison is rather minimum. Imams, in the best of cases, are seen by some prisoners as ‘facilitators’ – as a kind of trusted link between themselves and the prison establishment.

At worst, prison imams are no more than officers doing a 'prison job'. As I will explain in Chapter 5, it is the prison environment in itself that has the most powerful impact upon how Islam is interpreted in prison. This is so much the case that I suggest in later chapters that we may speak of a 'prison Islam' rather than 'Islam in prison'.

The impact of the prison environment is not just 'symbolic' but actually, I would say, 'biological' since neurological and cognitive elements are involved. To understand this, as discussed in Chapter 5 (see also Marranci 2006, 2008b), we have to make sense of how we, as human beings, experience what we call emotions and feelings, how we learn and how religious faith is not just the result of a particular cultural process. Indeed, an accurate analysis would argue that Muslims in prison turn to, or return to, Islam as an identity not because of having been introduced to, or convinced by, theological knowledge. As many prison imams told me, a significant number of Muslim prisoners do not even know how to pray correctly and that they show little interest in theological debates, but still profess a strong faith in Islam. With few exceptions, faith in prison is not the result of an intellectual commitment, but rather emotional processes.

Muslim prisoners live in a confined social world with most freedoms removed from them. The loss of control over one's life is, as Toch (1977) has demonstrated, part of the pain inflicted upon the prisoner. As will be explained in the chapters that follow, all prisoners would 'act' to change reality, in particular to create 'emotions' which can lead to feelings conducive to the reinforcement of that 'feel to be' so important for psychological (and consequently physical) well-being.³⁰ In other words, the main teacher of Islam in prison is prison itself through fear, and other associated emotions, which it induces in all prisoners. In Chapter 5, we will see how these emotions shake the prisoners' certainties, leading to two different modes of 'experiencing' Islam.

Islamic Extremism in Prison: Reality or Fantasy?

We have seen that it is possible to speak of a 'prison Islam' – but is extremism and radicalisation in prison a dangerous reality or an exaggeration, if not a fantasy, of some journalists? The problem is not to answer the question, but rather that the question in itself is misleading and so any answer will be far from satisfactory. However, the question, which is frequently asked, tells us that some, including the Prison Service, understand Islamic 'extremism', 'radicalisation' and even 'terrorism' within prison as a real,

tangible thing. For many, it is something that can be 'seen', 'spotted', 'defined' and consequently addressed (see also Marranci 2009). Analysing the discourses available about radicalism in prison, we can see that 'this thing' (referred to with various *isms* such as extremism, radicalism, Islamism, fundamentalism and terrorism) behaves more like a virus than an object, spreading and infecting at every opportunity. Isolation, prevention, removal or even (as in the case of the suggestion to build special prisons for Islamic extremists) 'lazarettos' are proposed in order to stop it. Similar to the case of a real virus, 'the thing' or the prison *Islamicisms*³¹ are spread by actions and objects. Although in this case it is not sneezes and unwashed forks that endanger the prison population, but rather tricky imams, undercover visitors, smuggled cassettes, Arabic (whom very few can read) jihadi pamphlets, and even ordinary articles of newspapers, *Al-Jazeera*, and *Nashid*.³²

In reality, as we shall see in Chapter 6, the different Islamicisms are not 'things' and are certainly not viral, not even in a 'symbolic' way. Extremism³³ is a *process*, and if certain radical literature, inspirational songs and sermons have an attraction for some people it is not because such materials are the *reason* for the radicalisation process, but rather because they are the tools to maintain it. It is precisely because extremism is a process, and not a 'thing', that it is difficult to measure or manage. Furthermore, many of the new prison policies designed to 'fight' it are not only aiming to failure, but will also potentially backfire (including after the custodial sentence, see Chapter 7). If I am correct in suggesting that we are observing a process, the first action to undertake is to understand it. As we shall see in Chapter 6, this means to start from prison, as an environment, and from what we have learnt of 'prison Islam'. As we have discussed above (see also Chapter 4), Muslims have a more difficult life within prison than other prisoners and this has an impact upon how Islam is understood. Toch (1975) has observed that the most maltreated prisoners, contrary to what may be expected, are not those who tend to break down psychologically, but rather it is those inmates whose idea of 'dignity' is the most violated. In prison, especially for prisoners of Muslim background, their ideas and subjective norms of how they must be treated are indeed often, voluntarily or because of prison regulations, extremely violated and this helps to form the idea that they are experiencing 'injustice'. Hence, the idea of dignity and justice, as we shall see, plays a fundamental role in the discourse of prison Islam.

My observations have suggested that prison induces a dualistic way of thinking and dualistic worldviews. In Chapter 6, we will discuss how Islam can become part of this dualistic prison thinking. Certainly, the most

evident effect of this dualistic mode, which affects not only Muslims, is the simplification of the prison world into Muslim and non-Muslim, halal and haram, and Islamic and un-Islamic. Some Muslim prisoners, however, developed an extreme version of this dualism and started to isolate themselves from the rest of the prison population, including other Muslims whom they considered to be 'plastic Muslims'. We will discuss in Chapter 6 how *tawhid* (the oneness of God) is at the centre of this extreme dualism and how *tawhid*, in some cases, is transformed from a theological tenet into an ideological tool of survival and a mechanism of maintaining one's own autobiographical-self. However, my research has emphasised that not all Muslim prisoners who adhere to this ideology – developed not by means of material culture but rather through cognitive and emotional experiences of the physical and social prison environment – can be defined 'extremists' or 'radicals'.

Another essential element of the process should be presented here: the shift from a *doctrinal mode* of Islamic religiosity to an *imagistic one* (Whitehouse 2004). I will explain how prisoners of Muslim backgrounds, after having ceased to practise Islam, rediscover their religion more through an 'epiphany' than a theological commitment. This process has an impact on how some Muslims react to the official version of Islam sponsored by the prison authorities and which the prison imam embodies. The emotional impact of prison, the frequent extreme lack of dignity perceived by some Muslim prisoners and the feeling that, despite their crimes, they are in prison because of a deeply rooted, eschatological injustice, provoke not only those 'cognitive openings' that many Muslim prisoners experience, but also a rarer spontaneous exegetical reflection. Imams within the prison (as indeed outside) operate inside a 'doctrinal mode of religiosity' that is based upon doctrines derived from scriptures (as in all monotheistic religions). However, since the majority of Muslim prisoners have had very little exposure to the doctrinal mode of Islamic religiosity, the traumatic experience of prison facilitates 'insights' and 'mystical' experiences (i.e. spontaneous exegetical reflection) in which emotions and feelings matter more than theological orthodoxy (of which very few Muslim prisoners have pre-prison knowledge). It is perhaps, then, unsurprising that the doctrinal mode of Islam offered within prison has little, if any, appeal to some Muslim prisoners.

Therefore, going back to the question of whether Islamic extremism exists in prison, we can see how the answer cannot be a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Today within prisons there exist conditions conducive to the transformation of 'prison Islam' into an 'emotional' version that, facilitated by

spontaneous exegetical reflection, ends in an imagistic mode of Islamic religiosity. This imagistic mode, as opposed to the doctrinal mode, is surely more prone to instability, essentialism, charismatic leadership, enclave-ment, fanaticism and irrational violence. In recent years, an increasing hardship for Muslim prisoners; an over focus on their religion; an increased abuse of segregation regimes; an increase within prisons of Muslim/non-Muslim tension; and a generalised surveillance and suspicion of even basic orthodox practices of Islam may transform the imagistic mode of Islamic religiosity from a relatively rare form of prison Islam to the most popular. Since, as we have just seen, 'Islamic extremism' in prison is in reality a process, the relationship between the prison environment and personal identities, as well as group affiliations, are of paramount importance to prevent the shift from the doctrinal mode of religiosity to the imagistic one.

Surely, the role of the prison imam should be reinforced and updated based upon these findings. At the same time, prevention is the only real solution and this means to reconsider how Muslims in prison are treated and the security policies recently introduced. Yet, as we shall see in Chapter 7, although this may reduce the risk within prison, it would not resolve the other, currently underestimated, problems (and potential risk of terrorism) that a lack of support for former Muslim prisoners has created. Indeed, although the mass media, the government and the general public seem concerned about 'extremism' in prison, it is certainly not from within the prison that the public face the danger of becoming victims of a terrorist attack.

Notes

- ¹ All names have been changed to respect the anonymity of the people involved in the research.
- ² Muslims pray in rows which respect a certain distance between them so as to allow them sufficient space for the prostration.
- ³ Among Muslims, we can find four traditional Sunni Muslim schools of thought or Madhahib that have been named after their founders: the Hanafis, Malikis, Shafi's and Hanbalis.
- ⁴ Lords Hansard 30 March 2000 (200330-03) Column 908, www.publications.parliament.uk
- ⁵ Others have brilliantly written about it (see for instance Beckford and Gilliat 1998; Gilliat 2008); this book will not discuss Muslim chaplaincy in any detail since it is beyond the aims of the present work and the topic deserves a specific in-depth analysis.
- ⁶ Muslims do not have any equivalent institution to the Christian chaplaincy, and so it is improper to speak of Muslim chaplains. However, since the structure has

been modelled on the established Church of England chaplaincy tradition, the Prison Service officially refers to prison imams as Muslim Chaplains. This is also because they have to provide, as any other chaplain, general assistance and care to any prisoner regardless of religious affiliation. Nonetheless, throughout the book, I will mainly employ the term 'prison imam' since the majority of my respondents use this terminology.

⁷ It is important to emphasise here that prison statistics cannot be precise because of the day-to-day changes in the prison population. Therefore, even substantial differences may exist in the statistical data that I will use in this book.

⁸ More often than not, for short-term prison sentences; see Chapters 3 and 7.

⁹ *Times Online*, July 30, 2005, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article549567.ece

¹⁰ *The Sunday Times*, September 28, 2008.

¹¹ *The Telegraph*, November 09, 2007, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1568748/Terrorists-jailed-in-UK-prisons-to-rise-tenfold.html

¹² *The Guardian*, May 25, 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/may/25/prisonsandprobation.ukcrime

¹³ *The Guardian*, May 25, 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/may/25/prisonsandprobation.ukcrime

¹⁴ Lords Hansard for 26 June 2008 (pt 0002) Column WA272, www.publications.parliament.uk

¹⁵ Leppard, David, 'Al-Qaeda bid to recruit inmates', *The Sunday Times*, September 28, 2008.

¹⁶ Alan Travis, 'Officials warn of terrorist links to prison gangs', *The Guardian*, Monday, 3 March 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/mar/03/prisons-terrorism.uk

¹⁷ Select Committee on Home Affairs Minutes of Evidence, Wednesday, 7 November 2007, Q290, www.publications.parliament.uk/

¹⁸ David Callaghan, 'Muslim prisoners "at risk of attack" in youth jails', *The Guardian*, 30 September 2005, www.guardian.co.uk/society/2005/sep/30/youthjustice.law, Richard Ford, 'Watchdog says Muslim prisoners ask to be isolated at Frankland', *The Times*, August 20, 2008, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article4568736.ece

¹⁹ See also Jamie Doward, 'Muslim gangs "are taking control of prison"' *The Guardian*, May 25, 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/may/25/prisonsandprobation.ukcrime

²⁰ For an overview of prison studies worldwide, see, for example, O'Brien 1982; Spierenburg 1991. For specific studies in the different fields see among others, Cohen and Taylor 1972; Finkelstein 1993; Genders and Player 1989; King and Morgan 1976; King and Elliot 1977; Liebling 1992; Sykes 1958.

²¹ The research was funded by The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, the University of Aberdeen, and The British Academy (Grant Ref: SG-4091).

²² Because, as explained, anonymity is essential in a research such as the one I conducted, I can only say that the six Scottish prisons included all categories and regions so that the sample was representative of the prison population. The same applies to the English and Welsh prison institutions.

- ²³ At the time, there were about 80 Muslim prisoners detained in Scottish prisons, and all of them, save for two, were male and Sunni. The majority of Scottish Muslim prisoners are of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin.
- ²⁴ My contact with the Prison Services, former prisoners and prison associations in the United Kingdom continue to this day.
- ²⁵ Currently, the Prison Service classifies establishments into four levels of security. The decision to allocate a prisoner to a specific category depends upon the severity of the crime committed and the risk of escape posed. The highest security category is A; categories B and C, respectively, are for prisoners who do not pose an extreme risk to society but whose escape should carefully be prevented. All these three categories of prison are closed prisons. For prisoners nearing the end of their sentence, or at a very low level of risk, there are open prisons (Category D or commonly known as 'Cat D') in which prisoners are often allowed licences to visit home or to visit nearby cities as part of their final rehabilitation.
- ²⁶ But see also the Ethical Guidelines of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) which, as an active member, I am obliged to adopt during my fieldwork.
- ²⁷ See Criminal Law Act 1967 (s4 and s5) and Official Secrets Act 1989.
- ²⁸ Another specific publication will be devoted to the topic.
- ²⁹ See also the 2006/2007 Annual Report of the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/docs/annual-report-99-00/
- ³⁰ Interestingly, self-harm, or even suicide, can be read as extreme, and self-destructive, forms of this process. Indeed, suicide can be seen as the most extreme 'act of identity' possible against the prison.
- ³¹ Of course, Islamicisms are not the only *isms* existing within prison. Others such as racism, hooliganism and 'Christianism' are very much present but generally deemed, as of today, to be irrelevant or unthreatening despite their potential.
- ³² Arabic songs, which may include different Islamic themes. Of course, some may also praise the 'mujahidin' or the 'martyrs' of different wars or 'resistance'. However, in many cases, due to the difficult poetic Qur'anic Arabic used, many listeners, if not Arabs or well educated in Arabic, are unable to understand the text.
- ³³ To use the most quoted term, but this applies to the other Islamicisms as well.

Chapter 2

Muslims, Islam and Crime in the United Kingdom

In the Introduction, we have seen the statistical disproportion of Muslims, particularly of South Asian origin, within UK prisons and how the post-9/11 climate has aroused a morbid interest of the press as well as the, often alarmist, concern of the British government about the alleged radicalisation of Muslim prisoners. Yet, with exceptions,¹ social scientists, and among them in particular anthropologists, have conducted little research aimed to analyse and explain the causes for which, out of a Muslim population of 1,588,890 (2.8 per cent of the entire UK population)², in 2006, an average of 8,000 Muslims were detained in prison. During my research Muslim prisoners accounted for more than 10 per cent of the English and Welsh prison population.³

We should be very careful in analysing statistical data, particularly when, like in this case, there is the risk of criminalising some ethnic minorities or a religious faith. Too often, the mass media have alluded to such essentialised reductionism and right wing parties, such as the British National Party (BNP), have capitalised on it. Nonetheless, as Spalek (2002) has observed, within the field of criminology, religious affiliation has been constantly ignored, 'National and local crime surveys tend to classify people according to their ethnic identities rather than their religious affiliations. [. . .] Findings indicate that religion is a central part of self-identity to many South Asians and as such should be a focus of research when studying crime-related issues' (Spalek 2002: 3). Similarly, although in the last 20 years many anthropologists and sociologists have focused on the British Muslim community,⁴ nearly no study has been devoted to the issue of crime and criminality affecting or existing within this community. By contrast, the mass media, since the 1990s, particularly after the so-called Rushdie Affair (Modood 1990; Halliday 1995; Asad 1990), has progressively identified as

'Muslim' (i.e. through religious affiliation) both the perpetrators of crimes and the victims of it. Goodey (2001: 443) has observed,

The more fundamentalist fringe of the Muslim 'community' received the widest media attention but did not speak for all members of that community. Regardless of the fact that only some members of the Asian community were engaged in aggressive actions against Rushdie, images remained in the popular consciousness that aided the shift in (white) public perception of all Asians from that of passive bystander to that of aggressor; and the police, as members of that public who had to police the Bradford demonstrations, were no more immune from these images.

Of course, other events such as the several riots in Bradford and Birmingham in recent years (Macey 1999a, 2002; Alexander 2000, 2004) and the aftermath of the events of 9/11, including the so-called war on terror (Marranci 2008a), have reinforced the stereotypes about not only British South Asians but also Muslims in general. We will see, in this chapter, how some aspects of crime among the different ethnic groups forming the various British Muslim communities have been, often arbitrarily, linked to international terrorism or 'Islamic fundamentalism', and how religion, thus, is substituting ethnicity in the analysis of crime.

Let me provide you with a recent example. On 3 February 2008, *The Sunday Times*⁵ published, under the headline 'Family of teen Muslim invited men to rape her', the story of an unfortunate 15-year-old Pakistani girl who was lured into a 'religious' marriage with a disabled middle-aged British Pakistani, contrary to her expectations of becoming the bride of a handsome young British Pakistani groom. The mother-in-law, who organised the scam, later forced her into prostitution. The article, starting from this sad case, goes on to explain the vulnerability of *Muslim* teenage girls to honour killings and forced marriages. The criminals in this case, as well as the victim, were of Pakistani descent and although the majority of Pakistanis are Muslim, cases of 'honour killings' and 'forced marriages' are still proportionally rare⁶ among the other 57 per cent of Muslims in the United Kingdom who are not of Pakistani or other South Asian origin. Certainly, the mass media would rarely, if ever, use religious categorisation in the case that the offenders were, for instance, of White Christian origin, or a member of another religion, such as Judaism or Hinduism. By contrast, even in the case in which a young Pakistani is the victim of a crime, his or her ethnic background or national origin melt under the powerful label,

Muslim. The following newspaper article provides a convincing example of the above.

On 23 June 2008, still in *The Times*⁷ we can read the headline, ‘Muslim teenager Ahmed Hassan murdered by white thug Michael Brook’. Here the victim, who is of Pakistani origin, is again identified as ‘Muslim’ while the murderer is merely referred to as a ‘White thug’. Of course, we do not know, and the journalist possibly could not have known, whether Ahmed Hassan would define himself as a Muslim, or if he were a practicing Muslim and so forth. Certainly, the journalist knew that Ahmed Hassan was ethnically a Pakistani, and this alone was enough to add the appellation ‘Muslim’. In other words, a religious identity was ascribed to Ahmed Hassan through ethnic affiliations because the majority of Asians in the United Kingdom are Muslims or born into a Muslim family. Yet the same criteria and system of classification was not applied to the killer, Michael Brook, whom the journalist identified as a ‘white thug’ rather than a ‘Christian’, notwithstanding the fact that 96.33 per cent of all White British define themselves as such. This homogenisation of different ethnic identities as well as different backgrounds within a monolithic ‘Muslim’ category would soon have serious consequences that we shall discuss in this and the following chapters.

Asian Crime? The Rhetoric of Ethnic Essentialism

At the end of the 1970s, Mawby and Batta (1980) offered one of the few in-depth studies of the involvement of South Asians in criminality, which also considered gender. The authors highlight the low level of crime among South Asians in the 1970s when compared to other ethnic groups, like those of African-Caribbean and other Black backgrounds. Yet they noticed that Asians tend to be overrepresented within the ‘immigrant groups’ who commit crimes (1980: 52). Mawby and Batta explain the average low level of crime through one of the most resilient stereotypes which continues to persist today: the concept of *izzat* (i.e. respectability; honour) within the South Asian and wider Muslim community, which is expected to act as a mechanism of social control.⁸ According to the authors, the strict control exerted by the elderly, as well as the wider family, within the community (cf. Werbner 2002) avoids that young Asians may easily feel conformable with criminal behaviour. No less powerful, according to Mawby and Batta, is the role of Islam, as religion.

As Quraishi (2005: 23) has noticed, although certainly a pioneering study, Mawby and Batta’s research has limitations, and not just because it is dated and very much based on a certain essentialist view (Marranci 2008a) of the

Asian community, but also because their data was derived mainly from police records, which were in most cases rather incomplete. Moreover, the research focused only on Bradford, and on a specific Asian ethnic background, the Mirpuri. Yet we cannot other than agree with Webster that

The racialised habit of describing British Muslims as ‘fundamentalist’ presupposes a unitary notion of Islam. The same can be said of the category ‘Asian’ in terms of a unitary notion of ethnicity. *These categories simply do not hold out any promise of the type of community and parental controls that are envisaged as solutions to delinquency.* (1997: 79, emphasis in the original)

A more recent study (Wardak 2000), which was conducted in Scotland, has attempted to provide a typology of the young Pakistani in Edinburgh. Wardak has suggested four different categories in which young British Pakistanis may fall: conformists, accommodationists, part-time conformists and rebels. He has employed Hirschi’s social control theory (1969) arguing that the risk of delinquency within his sample of 60 young Pakistani boys depends upon the strength of their bond with the mainstream Pakistani community. According to Wardak, those who rejected conforming to the community traditions and religious framework were ‘rebellious’ and thus became more at risk of committing crimes than the ‘conformists’.

Wardak has suggested that the level of delinquency, or the risk of it, was very low (8.33 per cent) among his sample of young Pakistanis. Wardak’s study, although relevant and one of the few to address the issue of delinquency within Asian communities, has clear methodological limits as well as analytical problems. He has focused on Edinburgh and selected his 60 respondents (both at risk and not) from the regular students at a mosque madrasa. As we shall discuss later and in the following chapters, during my research I have found that the great majority of my respondents who had committed crimes, or were former as well as current prisoners, declared to have ceased mosque attendance at an average age of 10. This is an age much younger than that of the respondents in Wardak’s sample. I tend to think that his group of young Pakistanis can hardly be representative of the vast majority of those living in the United Kingdom. Indeed, even the location is problematic: Scotland, in particular during the 1990s, had an extremely low level of criminality within the Pakistani community, which was in contrast with the higher level within the rest of the United Kingdom. Wardak’s study cannot be generalised and should be read as a much-focused study on a particular community.

Of further concern is the categorisation that Wardak has proposed. Wardak's representation of the Pakistani Muslim community has failed to recognise the heterogeneity and generational dynamics that exist within the community in Edinburgh. Furthermore, he has neglected to address the multidimensional elements that influence most of the young Pakistani boys. He has reproduced a picture of the community which seems to conform highly with the representation often offered by community-religious leaders as well as elders. Webster has rightly observed, 'For those types of cultural essentialist criminological arguments, the key question therefore is whether, and to what extent, Muslim young people are socially bonded, attached and so on, to the cultural and social institutions of a specifically Muslim parent culture, which is seen in unitary and homogenised ways' (1997: 73).

During the period from the 1960s to the mid-1990s, the Asian communities in Britain 'were considered as [. . .] unthreatening law abiding and unproblematic – a portrait that erased the role of both racial inequality and violence, and resistance in the formation of community identities' (Alexander 2000: 15). Of course, the 1989 Rushdie Affair had affected the reputation of the Asian communities – but more as 'Muslims' than as Asians. The Affair had reinforced the stereotype of a Muslim community unable to adapt to 'British values' rather than a shift among Asians towards criminality, marking, however, a first step towards the overall idea of an 'Asian issue' in the United Kingdom (Alexander 2000, 2004; Goodey 2001). Nonetheless, a series of civil disturbances and riots, particularly affecting Bradford in 1995 and 2001 (Amin 2003), first aroused the fear of an increase in Asian criminality in the new guise of the 'Asian Gang' (Alexander 2000), and more recently, and as will later be discussed, the 'Muslim Gang'

Webster (1997) has offered an analysis of how the constructed perception of 'Asian criminality' has changed between 1989 and 1994. He has noticed that during that particular time frame, violence perpetrated by Whites against Asians had consistently declined. Webster has rightly observed that this is not due to a less racist attitude towards Asians but rather to the capacity of young Asians to establish, maintain and extend what he has called safe areas 'through loosely organised self-defence groups that deterred white incursions into their areas' (1997: 75). This generational, and hence new, reaction to White racism and attacks that were previously passively resisted has, according to Webster,

generated those very conditions that whites complained about to the study; that attacks on Asians had declined and attacks on whites had increased, enabling white young people to portray racism as something

that black people inflict on whites in the form of violent racism and abuse aimed at whites, and that Asians were a threat to public order (*their order*). A further consequence was a growing perception among the police and local agencies of Asians gangs, involvement in drug abuse and criminality. (Ibid.: 76, emphasis in original)

The myth of Asian Muslims as a low crime and law-abiding community was, therefore, shattered. Yet, as we have seen, the mass media, social services, police and many social scientists interpreted the issues as an effect of a generation gap. The argument often expressed by the community leaders that this was the effect of erosion of the traditional Asian and Muslim cultures, became the official version of a more complex and diverse issue.

We may, thus, not be so surprised that Webster also has concluded his analysis with a categorisation, including ‘conformists’, ‘experimenters’, ‘vigilantes’, which are somewhat similar to Wardak’s categories. However, Webster’s list includes a new label: ‘Islamists’. In this group, according to the author, young Pakistanis reject the culture of their parents except for Islam, seen as superior to tradition, and sometimes partake in the vigilantes’ activity of self-defence, territorial control and policing (e.g. against drug dealers and prostitution as well as White racist attacks). Nonetheless, Webster’s conclusions about Asian criminality are different from those which Wardak has offered,

The Asian parent culture, like the police and other control agencies, has been unable to address, accommodate or engage with the social and cultural experiences of large sectors of its young people, caught as they are between essentialist and fixed notions of cultural tradition, and the realities of Muslim cultural flux and experimentation. This unbearable ambivalence and tension then becomes resolved in imaginary ways and translated into a notion of contagion in which criminality is ascribed to what is often merely social deviance. (1997: 79–80)

Webster, therefore, has refused to suggest that there is a particular issue, other than the cultural imaginary ‘contraction’ of Asian crime, with young Asians. Indeed, he has explained the riot and civil disturbance, as well as the reported increase of Asian attacks on White people, as a change in the Asian generational attitude towards racist provocation. If their parents (or even grandparents) reacted passively to racist attacks, according to Webster, the new generation, still distrusting the efficacy of the police actions, prefer to actively defend themselves and ‘their territory’.

However, even at the time Webster was writing, there is a relevant increase of Asian (some will say, Muslim) criminality. Webster has explained that there is no need for a unique interpretation for 'Asian crimes', since

persistent offenders are so for the same reasons as their white counterparts: the ubiquitous age-crime curve falls on Asian, particularly Pakistani/Bengali, youngsters; cumulative relative deprivation over a generation in the context of a failure of the education system to credential the majority of these youngsters; the continuing doldrums of the youth labour market; and an inability of social institutions to address the needs and desires of young people, cut adrift and left alone to make sense for themselves of the conditions which surround them. (Webster 1997: 80)

As we shall see, Webster's observations, although in the different dynamics of the Asian and other Muslim communities in 2008, are still extremely relevant.⁹

In the aftermath of the 2001 riots in Bradford, newspapers started to describe certain areas of Bradford as 'no-go areas' and 'ghettos' in a language which derived more from the urban American reality of street gangs than from the actual complex situation of Bradford (see Alexander 2004: 529). Gang culture is not a new phenomenon in the United Kingdom (Evans, K. 2008), but it differs from that which exists, and is better known, in the United States (Stelfox 1998). Bennett and Holloway report that gang members in the United Kingdom appear to be in majority White (2004), though they also notice that 35 per cent define themselves as Asians. Alexander (2000, 2004) has highlighted how

'The Asian Gang' has emerged as a relatively new phenomenon, at least in the minds of the media and more latterly, of academics and social researchers. Its discovery has brought Asian communities to the forefront of public concerns over crime, urban decay, poverty and civil unrest, increasingly taking the place of Britain's African-Caribbean communities as scapegoats amidst renewed prophecies of millennial social doom. 'The Asian Gang' has particular potency, fusing longer established fears of 'the Underclass', and 'the 'the Fundamentalist/Terrorist' with the physical presence of young men on the imaginary landscape of the city. Concerns over 'social exclusion' then seamlessly become translated into the making of boundaries of 'social inclusion' in the imagination of society and nation, defining out the marginalized, the alien, the Othered. (Alexander 2000: 229)

Alexander is surely right when highlighting the mass media constructions of what she has called 'The Asian Gang' and the lack of understanding of the complex dynamics, which she has described in her work. However, we have to admit, that Alexander, in her previous and most recent research, seems unable to provide a crucial, and much needed, explanation of what can be defined as religious 'racialisation' discourse existing among (although still relatively few) young Asians of particularly Bangladeshi and Pakistani background.

Between Reality and Fiction: Muslim Criminals in Popular and Academic Discourse

Since 11 September 2001 and particularly after the London bombings on 7 July 2005 as well as the failed attack on July 21 of the same year, what was mainly a concern about an increase in Asian criminality, or 'Asian gangs', shifted towards a religious categorisation. The symbolism of the Rushdie Affair, in which an 'enemy within', a powerful cultural force against 'British values', seen as a wider extension of Western Judeo-Christian civilisation (Marranci 2004a) is, directly or indirectly, linked to the shocking terrorist attacks in London and Glasgow (not to mention many terrorist plots) and to what before was mere 'racial' trouble. Some journalists such as Richard Littlejohn (Marranci 2004a) and Melanie Phillips (2006) have argued that the British government has not been able to perceive as a threat to British values and society what was actually an attempt to impose 'Muslim' values (presented, of course, as inferior to those of the 'West'). The Asian gang and Asian criminality¹⁰ are represented and constructed as something more ominous: a 'plot' for the 'Islamisation' of Britain.

For instance, though Phillips (2006),¹¹ in the first instance, seems to attack Muslim extremists, it becomes evident that Muslims in general¹² are under charge, either because they '[refused] to accept *minority status* and insisted instead that their values must trump those of the majority' (2006: 28, emphasis mine), or because 'playing on the pathological fear of prejudice created by victim culture, Muslims refuse to accept responsibility for Islamist violence, blame the British government instead for siding with America over Afghanistan and Iraq, and denounce any resistance *to the imposition of an Islamic perspective* as "Islamophobia"' (2006: 28, emphasis in original). So, in conclusion, here is the real face of the monster:

The West is under threat from an enemy that has shrewdly observed the decadence and disarray in Europe, where Western civilisation first began.

And the greatest disarray of all is in Britain, the very cradle of Western liberty and democracy, but whose cultural confusion is now plain for all to see in Londonistan [. . .] Whether it will finally pull itself together and stop sleepwalking into cultural oblivion is a question on which the future of the West may now depend. (Phillips 2006: 285)

The threat and danger is no longer from a frustrated and discriminated against section of young British society, which was born in the United Kingdom but is still perceived as part of a historical past. The young Asians find themselves projected into parallel dimensions in which ethical and moral, as well as political, values may become cacophonous, almost schizophrenic. They represent the materialisation of an unwanted and unplanned post-colonial present, as their parents once represented the objectification of a glorious colonial empire now past (see Doty 2003: 44–57). The coloniser's resistance to the self-determination of the colonised used to repeat 'you belong to us'. Now, in an inverted performance of power, the former coloniser feels colonised and asks 'are you one of us?'

The passage is short from the mass media to the political and civil sphere. More and more politicians, public figures and even 'moderate Muslims' repeat the same simplified, culturalist version of the above story, with, of course, varying levels of 'political correctness'. Therefore, recently, a senior Church of England bishop, the Rt. Rev. Michael Nazir-Ali of Rochester has described as Muslim 'no-go areas' what some journalists, as we have seen above, referred to as 'Asian gang-territory'.¹³ Of course, the comment did not pass unnoticed and sparked a heated debate. Yet the debate was more on whether these 'no-go areas' existed rather than the clear fact that the Bishop had used the word 'Muslim' for them. Indeed, the areas to which he was referring had a high percentage of Pakistani residents. Ethnicity, and ethnic background, collapsed into a powerful political rhetoric of religious determination and essentialism. As we shall see, however, this essentialised political rhetoric has unexpected dynamics within the varied components that we call, in a linguistic simplification, the 'Muslim community'.

Academia, as I have discussed elsewhere (Marranci 2008b), is not immune from such cultural reductionism. This is particularly true of some scholars, such as Macey (1999a). Because of space, and the need to deconstruct with a certain accuracy her discourse, I shall focus on Macey's argument and her interesting shift from a mainly ethnic-gender-religious analysis to one based primarily on religion after 9/11. Indeed, her more recent work, as we shall see, seemed to answer Spalek's call for an increased debate on the role of religion in criminal behaviour (2002: 6). Macey's research at the end of the 1990s had a strong feminist approach. In her article 'Religion, male

violence and the control of women: Pakistani Muslim men in Bradford', she has sought to identify the reasons behind the increase of violent and criminal behaviour among young male Pakistanis and criticised scholars such as Burlet and Reid (1998) for misrepresenting both the reality of Pakistani women and the reasons for young Pakistani male violence.

She has introduced her study with unusually defensive statements about her research: 'material which may at first sight appear to be little more than impressionistic is, in fact, grounded in the lived reality of Bradford people, particularly Pakistani women' (Macey 1999b: 847). However, an attentive analysis shows that the issue is not limited to the 'impressionistic' character of the material, but rather the extremely unsettling methodology. Macey has provided a description of the kind of respondents she has involved in her research on Pakistani men in Bradford:

The primary data reported in this article were collected over a four year period from the following sources: staff teaching in further and higher education institutions; male and female university students; police personnel working with Asian women fleeing from either domestic violence or forced marriages; staff of a drugs project working with young Asian men; staff of a domestic violence agency working with Asian women; staff of a children's society working with young teenage prostitutes (working women) and survivors of domestic violence.

The reader may immediately spot an essential omission. In an article focusing on male Pakistani violence, the voice of the protagonist group has been 'silenced' (or should I say censored?). Indeed, for Macey, as for some other feminist scholars, gender means women in opposition and power struggle with – often by virtue of genetics – oppressive men, rather than the result of complex dynamics existing between male and female or vice versa (Marranci 2008b: 117–39). Macey's 4 years of research, on which much of her former and current (2007) publications are based, sounds more akin to a prosecutor's investigation in a court battle to pin down the 'culprit' than a social scientific research aimed at understanding the complex reality of young Pakistani men.

Indeed, this 'accusatory' approach, which is certainly of some political and advocacy value, permeates her research from the beginning. She has reviewed some of the main social scientific arguments explaining (though certainly not justifying) young Pakistani male criminality. However, she does so through a sort of *via negatione* which has rejected most arguments as misleading. For instance, 'multiple deprivation' has been often identified as one of the main reasons leading young people towards criminal

activities. Macey has excluded this as a major factor in young Pakistani criminality by arguing that, 'comparable white areas of multiple deprivation, such as Thorpe Edge, where youth unemployment stands at 32 per cent [. . .] have not been the site of public disorder' (1999b: 848). I have serious concerns about Macey's decision to describe riots and general crime as part of the same category; they are not. Riots and civil disturbances, although still very much part of an illegal and criminal activity, cannot be compared with crimes such as drug abuse/dealing, sexual assaults, theft and so on. Riots are the result of an outburst of anger (which may be organised or not) that affects a particular area for a relatively short time. People involved in riots may have never committed a crime before. The comparison, in case, should be with other forms of 'civil disturbance', and in the case of White British deprived youth, football hooliganism (see for instance the recent cases in Manchester)¹⁴ would perhaps be more appropriate.

We may expect that she can agree that 'inadequate education provision' may have a relevant impact on young Pakistani men's offending rates. Although Macey has acknowledged the low level of education of Pakistani boys, she has explained to the reader that Pakistani girls do much better at school and try to benefit from education. According to her, this not only shows that, notwithstanding the existing opportunity, Pakistani men prefer the streets to the school desk, but also that 'there is evidence, too, that young Pakistani men's reaction to the growing educational divide between themselves and Pakistani women takes the form of harassment and threatened or actual violence against both female HE students and their parents' (1999b: 849; see also Macey 1996). Here again Macey has offered us a partial truth, a decontextualised one. We will discuss the issue of education in the next section in more detail; however, statistics from the 2001 Census tell us that Pakistani men with a degree or a qualification have even fewer opportunities to find a job than their unqualified peers, and the worst situation is affecting British Pakistani men. Now, it is not difficult to understand that such a reality is anything but an incentive to decide to spend years in education. Finally, the allegation that Pakistani men systematically harass and use violence against Pakistani women because of jealousy of the women's educational success is a clear result of Macey's faulty methodology. Although there have been some cases of harassment, my research has shown that they have been circumstantial and linked to the particularly conflictual relationships of some families. This does not mean that there is no violence against educated Pakistani women, but Macey's simplification and generalisation is again an attempt to blame 'Pakistani men' as a category.

Some scholars have suggested that cases of racial harassment by the police could have facilitated the increase of Pakistani male violence, particularly

as far as civil disturbances are concerned. Macey, through a ‘yes . . . but’ as well as a ‘somebody told me that somebody’ style, has alleged that some young Pakistani men have actually planned the disturbances in order to intimidate the police, and the tension is created by the fact that ‘the demands made on the police by the various parties involved in such disputes are irreconcilable: young women claim their right to protection and male relatives and other members of the community claim the right to control “their” women’s behaviour in the name of *izzat* or family honour’ (1999b: 850). Furthermore, she has argued that the police have to face the Pakistani community’s violent attitude ‘against people viewed as offending against the Islamic code’ (ibid.). Although Macey has surely addressed some relevant issues here (which scholars have understudied), they are simplified and juxtaposed. The attempt to cover one issue – some cases of racism among police officers – with another – the issues of ‘women control’ among certain Pakistani men – does not provide an explanation for either.

In the last section of this long article, Macey has provided an analysis of recent (in this case 1995) riots as the result of an escalation of Pakistani demands over British values. While the 1960s immigrant generation limited themselves to passive legal protests, from the 1980s, starting with the famous case of *The Bradford 12*, passing through the 1982–3 halal meat request for Muslim school children which led to the infamous Honeyford Affair (in 1984) and also the Rushdie Affair (in 1989), the emergence of riots ‘demonstrate the growing confidence of Pakistani Muslims to make *demands* of the white establishment, and, secondly, these demands were based on the assertion of a specifically Muslim identity’ (1999b: 854, emphasis in the original). Therefore, in the last part of her article she has focused on the role of religion (i.e. Islam). Her interpretation of religion is derived from an old school of feminism in which religion is directly linked to patriarchy; Islam becomes the best tool for controlling and restraining the freedom of women. In conclusion, in this article, Macey seems to tell us that Pakistani male Muslims are to be blamed entirely because they remain anchored to a Mirpuri culture and Islamic tradition since this helps them to cover their own identity contradictions and affirm male authority over law-abiding, progressive, Pakistani women. Islam has, therefore, a role and certainly not a positive one in the case of young Pakistani male Muslims. She has concluded her article by hiding behind Patel’s words (1998) to ultimately blame multiculturalism for compromising Western values and so, by extension, the freedom of Pakistani Muslim women.

Let me first say that I am surprised at Macey’s surprise that, in contrast to the migrant generation of the 1960s, their children and grandchildren dared to ‘make *demands* of the white establishment’. Indeed, during one

generation, the social position of the Pakistani community had changed: they were here to stay and they had children who were, and are, no less British than Macey. This change explains the shift from passive protests to active requests, unfortunately sometimes marked by violence. Yet it would be intellectually dishonest to underline – as Macey does – the fact that some Asian demonstrations ended in violence, and at the same time forget how many protests held by White British turned out to be no less bloody (for instance the miners strikes in 1984 or the 1990 poll tax protests, see also Lea 2004). Yet it is Macey's description of an escalation, from the halal meat request, to the Bradford riots, passing through the Rushdie Affair, of a threatening Islamic identity which would become the focus of her subsequent publications (2002, 2007). Although the structure of her argument remains the same (so much so that some parts cannot be easily distinguished from the 1999b article), what before were 'young Pakistani men' or 'young Pakistani Muslims', became 'young Muslim men' after 9/11. Hence, the title of her 2002 chapter reads, 'Interpreting Islam: young Muslim men's involvement in criminal activity in Bradford', and likewise the no less essentialised 2007 one, 'Islamic Political radicalism in Britain: Muslim men in Bradford'. What in her articles written in 1999 was blamed upon patriarchy and ethnicity is now due to 'the requirement of Islam' (2002: 26–27). Of course, Macey has again employed the same defensive 'yes . . . but' style that we have discussed above. To any attentive reader it becomes clear that she advances a very culturalist argument for which, 'the link between Islam and crime is both direct and indirect: the former when Muslims commit (or justify) crime in the name of Islam, the latter when Islamic doctrine (or its cultural interpretation) operates to put Muslims in situations commonly seen as predisposing people to criminal activity' (2002: 39). Macey has informed us that not only is Islam responsible for crime, or for inducing people to commit it, but also for 'poverty itself! As we can read, 'Poverty itself is partially a consequence of Islamic definitions of appropriate gender roles, particularly the expectations that women's primary focus should be husbands, homes and families' (2002: 40–1). What in the 1999 article was blamed upon the macho, patriarchal, Mirpuri behaviour of Pakistani men has now, in 2002 and 2007, become the responsibility of Islam: 'Some of this [criminal behaviour] is explicable in social economic terms and some is a consequence of racism. *But it can be suggested that Islam itself* contributes to the situation in a numbers of ways' (Macey 2002: 40, italics added). I will quote only one of the many instances in which Macey has alleged that Islam is the cause of deprivation (from educational underachievement to bad health) amongst British Pakistanis and Muslims in general; Macey tells

us that, 'poor, overcrowded housing is not only due to racism by building societies and housing authorities, but also connected to the Islamic prohibition on mortgages and usury' (2002: 40).

I have neither time nor space to criticise point by point Macey's extremely flawed, and possibly ideologically driven, arguments. Yet, allow me to provide an example of how her arguments are often factually built upon stereotypes which have no real foundation. As an anthropologist conducting research in the same areas, I can say that to adduce poor and overcrowding housing to the Islamic proscription against *riba* (usury) is totally misleading for at least two reasons. First, during my research I have come across evidence that many, perhaps even a majority, of South Asian Muslims who could have afforded to accept a mortgage would do so, although a minority may prefer an 'Islamic' banking option available not only from Islamic banks but also many mainstream ones as well. Secondly, Macey's possible ignorance of Islamic theology, and her trust in common stereotypes of a monolithic Islam, has led her to overlook the important fact that the majority of Pakistanis adhere (though sometimes unknowingly) to the so-called Hanafi school, one of the main four Sunni madhahib (schools of thought), which allows Muslims living in a non-Muslim country to use, if lacking other solutions, western mortgages. I have also to remind the reader that many Muslims, as in other religious denominations, do not fully practise all aspects of their religion and a significant number of Muslims use 'Islam' as an identity, rather than a theological commitment. In addition, Macey's argument, concerning the damaging aspects of Islam as a religion, collapses at the first comparative test. We need to remember that neither is Islam the only religion in the United Kingdom, nor are Muslims the only believers; furthermore, Islam is certainly not the only religion embodied as 'a way of life', nor is it the only one to have a 'divine legal system'. Take for example Orthodox Judaism and its community in London and observe the statistics provided by the Census 2001 (Dobbs et al. 2006). You can compare them with the reality of Macey's Muslims: Orthodox Jews, although having strict religious rules, also affecting the 'freedom' of women and increasing the size of families, are neither poor nor undereducated and they own their own houses. Now, Macey may have at least two options to stick to her assumption that Islam itself is to blame for the poor socio-economic performance of Muslim families: the first one is to argue that Islam is somehow inherently evil or inferior to Judaism or Christianity; the second one is to argue that 'usury' is the main factor allowing the Orthodox Jewish community to avoid the poor performance of Muslims. Of course, if she selected the former case, she would end up offering a

useless theological diatribe reminiscent of the dark ages; if, however, she opted for the latter, she would find herself reproducing an old, and disturbing, anti-Semitic cliché.

Now, we may go back to Spalek's argument that policy-makers, criminal justice and other voluntary agencies need to pay more attention to religion itself¹⁵ and notice that such advocacy, even when the intention is noble as in Spalek's case, can lead to pernicious essentialism and cause serious damage not only to the minority community but also to the wider society. The risk in following this rationale is to perpetuate those misleading views that Macey has so brilliantly brought to our attention. As I have explained elsewhere (Marranci 2008b), I tend to call this radical religious essentialism the fallacy of the 'Muslim mind theory'.¹⁶ This fallacy argues that religion induces Muslims to believe, behave, act, think, argue, live and develop their identity as Muslims despite their disparate heritages, ethnicities, nationalities, experiences, gender, sexual orientations and, last but not least, mind. In other words, this argument seems to suggest that Muslims' believing in Islam makes them a sort of cloned Central Processing Unit (CPU): different styles, different colours, same process. Sometimes this fallacy is the result of generalisations, some of which are difficult to avoid. At other times, however, it is more ideological and the by-product of an extreme culturalist position.

In all cases, the root of it is the, latent or manifest, unrecognised fact that a Muslim person is primarily a human being and behaves as such. Another reason for such misleading culturalist essentialism, for instance so evident no less in Macey's academic discourse than Melanie Phillips' book¹⁷ is the strongly rooted assumption among many non-Muslims, that Muslims, particularly men, are more religiously observant than in other monotheistic religions. As we shall see in this book, this assumption has relevant consequences for former and current Muslim prisoners and their families as well as the criminal justice system.

It is not easy to discuss what 'religiosity' is, and among scholars, this remains a very open and much debated topic (Hill and Hood 1999); but to find the parameters to measure it is even more controversial. Who is the 'strong believer'? Is it the individual constantly practising the main tenets of the religion (for instance in the case of Islam, praying five times per day, attending the Friday prayers and so forth)? Or, is it the one for whom life is marked by 'feeling to be', in this case, Muslim?¹⁸ Or, is it the person for whom religion is linked to his self-representation as an individual within the social context? However, even if we decide upon a particular parameter to indicate who the 'strong believer' might be, the selection can only work within a certain context and framework marked by social norms, political

definitions and usage. Hence, in Saudi Arabia, if a strict Wahabi may be seen as a 'strong' believer by his peers, surely an Iranian Shi'a would not be perceived as such. Nonetheless, even if we, for the sake of the argument, accept the main stereotypes of many British non-Muslims about what it means to be a Muslim, we would discover that the great majority of Muslims in the United Kingdom (as is true for the rest of the world) do not fit the expectation.

In my years of teaching and research, I have often asked non-Muslims, mainly White British though of other ethnic, social and economic backgrounds as well, why Muslims are considered 'more religious' than believers of other religions. The answers displayed an amazing homogeneity: Muslims respect prayers and pray five times per day; fast during Ramadan; attend the mosque for prayers (at least on Friday); know the Qur'an and can recite it; parents send their children to the mosque and the madrasa and the children attend it until the age of 16; women cover their hair with hijab and sometimes even their face; Muslims do not drink, they avoid drugs and respect 'Islamic law' even more than the law of the United Kingdom; they have a strong sense of honour, so much so that women remain virgins before marriage and do not have boyfriends; and finally, they do not accept democracy and the division between church and state (i.e. secularism). Interestingly, Macey, has employed similar stereotypes to argue that one of the reasons for the underachievement of Muslims in the United Kingdom is that Muslim boys, particularly Pakistanis, have to spend so much time at the mosque, and learning Arabic, that they 'are extremely tired in school. The learning of Arabic impacts negatively on young boys' development of English language competence' (Macey 2002: 40).

In the great majority of cases, as my research has demonstrated and we shall discuss in this book, the above descriptions of Muslim religiosity are at best utopian and at worst, fictional. Of course, there are Muslims in the United Kingdom who may fit such a representation, but they are the exception rather than the rule. In reality, the majority of Muslims do not attend mosques (often, if the mosque is attended at all, it is only on Fridays); they do not pray five times per day; very few, particularly if British born, can utter more than a handful of Qur'an verses to perform the prayers; the majority in the United Kingdom cannot read nor understand Arabic; few children, especially when compared to the overall number of Muslim children, attend the 'madrasa' and in most cases, by the age of 10 they will stop attending it; many Muslim women do not wear the hijab (i.e. head scarf) and certainly not all the time, and a massive majority of Muslim women do not cover their faces; there is a constant increase in Muslim women, particularly British

born, who have boyfriends and are sexually active and use contraception before marriage; there is an increasing number of Muslim single parents; Muslim boys are affected by a concerning rate of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV; a considerable number of Muslims drink alcohol more or less sporadically (particularly beer); the majority of Muslims believe in democracy and take part in it by voting at the general elections for parties and candidates that are non-Muslim; the majority do not support the idea of a Caliphate; and finally, many Muslims in the United Kingdom believe that their life is better in the United Kingdom than in an 'Islamic country'.

Of course, Muslim leaders, politicians and commentators such as Melanie Phillips would not tell you this. Yet you need only to live among ordinary Muslims and follow, day by day, their lives to immediately notice that Muslims are just, in the great majority, ordinary people with ordinary lives and ordinary problems. Yet it is the 'extraordinary' that attracts the attention of the mass media and, unfortunately, academia. Indeed, how many academic articles and books can we cite which have focused on the above aspects of being Muslim? How many articles (both journalistic as well as academic) have focused on Muslims who drink, Muslims who do not wear hijab, on the real attendance at mosques or on the ordinary reality, sometimes painful and distressing, of human beings that, for different reasons were socially identified as, or 'felt to be', Muslim?

Maybe a fear of the 'ordinary' as far as religion is concerned, and particularly in the case of Islam and Muslims, has kept anthropologists distant from the prisons as well as from discussing criminality within, for instance, UK Asian communities. Yet, as we shall discuss in the next chapter, to avoid the religious essentialism affecting certain academic work aimed at understanding whether 'religion' is to blame for the criminal behaviour of its believers, we need to listen to the voices, and follow the lives (both within and outside prison), of those who have committed, or are facing the consequences for having committed, crimes. Indeed, we cannot other than agree with Goodey's observation that, 'there is what people say, there is what people do, and there is what people say about what they do' (2001: 435). Thus, depending upon the setting and the context, observation – or better participant observation – can reveal or explain and clarify what the words alone may have confused or obscured (see also Back 1996: 22).

Conclusions

In this chapter we have seen that criminality among members of the various British Muslim communities have been understudied and that the few

existing studies have focused mainly on young British Pakistanis. Since the Rushdie Affair, and then 9/11, we have witnessed a shift in the academic understanding of the British Muslim population from an all too often ethnic-centric view (where 'Muslim' in the United Kingdom was synonymous with Mirpuri Pakistani) to an over focus on religion alone. This shift today is present within the academic attempt to explain both the increase in ordinary, as well as terrorism-related, crime among Asians, British Blacks, and African-Caribbean people, of Muslim origins. As we have seen above, some scholars have started to explain the dramatic reality in the United Kingdom, where five out of a Muslim population of 1,000 are in prison, by identifying the practice of a religion, Islam, as a main contributing factor. This is surely a powerful, though controversial, and yet for some, apparently convincing, extreme culturalist and religious essentialist way of explaining the odd statistic. Although this is a legitimate question, as Spalek (2002) has advanced, it is my contention that we need to provide a strong criticism of any attempt to see religion as a master key for understanding human behaviour.

Mamdani is among the most critical of this culturalist and symbolic approach which, in his renowned book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (2004), he has renamed 'Culture Talk'. He has observed, 'Culture Talk assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of the essence. Culture Talk after 9/11, for example, qualified and explained the practice of "terrorism" as "Islamic". "Islamic terrorism" is thus offered as both description and explanation of the events of 9/11' (2004: 18). Mamdani has pointed out how the practice of 'Culture Talk' has divided the world between moderns and pre-moderns, with the former being only able to conduit rather than make culture. Mamdani has particularly criticised the essentialist approach that much of 'Culture Talk' has had towards Muslims and Islam in the aftermath of 9/11. According to him, the 'Culture Talk' reasoning argues that Islam and Muslims 'made' culture at beginning of their history, but in the contemporary world they merely conform to culture. He, therefore, has concluded,

According to some, our [Muslim] culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates, so that all Muslims *are* just plain bad. According to others, there is a history, a politics, even debates, and there *are* good Muslims and bad Muslims. In both versions, history seems to have petrified into a lifeless custom of an antique people who inhabit antique lands. Or could it be that culture here stands for habit, for some kind of instinctive activity with rules that are inscribed in early founding texts, usually religious, and mummified in early artefacts? (2004: 18, emphasis in the original)

Mamdani has rightly expressed his concerns about the political and social consequences of understanding Muslims, and their religion, as merely a product of culture since it reduces religion not just to politics, but also to a political category. This process, in the best-case scenario, facilitates a Manichean sociological and political division between good and bad Muslims.

Mamdani has no problem to tell us why such a division, which is a soft version of the more radical stance of 'Islam is the problem', has been emphasised in the aftermath of 9/11. He has argued that this reasoning has helped to justify the belief in a clash between modern and pre-modern people, or, in other words, civilised versus civilisable which was very much a part of the history of colonialism; Mamdani has so observed that 'this history stigmatises those shut out of modernity as antimodern because they resist being shut out' (2004: 19). He has further argued for the epistemological fallacy of 'Culture Talk'. Mamdani has rejected the idea that political behaviours and ideologies can derive solely from cultural (religious or traditional) habits and customs and rhetorically asked, 'could it be that a person who takes his or her religion literally is a potential terrorist? And that someone who thinks of a religious text as metaphorical or figurative is better suited to civic life and the tolerance it calls for? How, one may ask, does the literal reading of sacred texts translate into hijacking, murder and terrorism?' (2004: 20). Mamdani's analysis of Culture Talk is especially relevant in our studies of Muslims, from different ethnic, cultural and Islamic backgrounds who, for different reasons, have come to experience the English or Scottish (or both) criminal justice system. Before focusing on my respondents who were held in prison, I wish to provide a different, ethnographically based, analysis of the reasons for which such a high proportion of young Muslims have experienced prison.

Notes

¹ See for instance Quraishi 2005; Alexander 2000, 2004; Spalek 2002; Macey 2002; Goodey 2001.

² The statistics, unless otherwise specified, are derived from the Census 2001.

³ In this chapter, I am using the statistics that were provided during my fieldwork by HM Prison Service in the year 2006–7. Currently, as we have seen in the Introduction, the Muslim prison population is up to 11 per cent.

⁴ Just to mention a few studies: Anwar 1979; Nielsen 1985; Barton 1986; Shaw 1998; Modood 1990; Qureshi and Moores 1999; Werbner 1994, 2002; Jacobson 1998; Marranci 2004a, 2006, 2008b.

⁵ For the internet version of the article see: www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article3295487.ece

- ⁶ Yet, they can also be found among the Bangladeshi and Kurdish communities.
- ⁷ For the internet version of the article see: www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article4199923.ece
- ⁸ See also Wardak 2000, who would also add *Biraderi* (i.e. kinship and friend networks) as well as the mosques and the Muslim associations to the overall mechanism of social control.
- ⁹ For similar arguments, see the more recent studies by Alexander 2000 and 2004; Goodey 2001.
- ¹⁰ It includes African-Caribbean and Black African Muslims, and even converts, particularly when they are former prisoners.
- ¹¹ See also Phillips's blog www.spectator.co.uk/melaniephillips/ for more recent, similar articles.
- ¹² With some clear exceptions, based on what Phillips refers to as the 'Israel-Zionism' test, that is, if a Muslim accepts Israel as a legitimate state and Zionism as a democratic and civilising force in the region.
- ¹³ See *The Guardian*, Monday, January 7, 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/jan/07/religion.politics
- ¹⁴ *The Times*, May 15, 2008, 'Manchester riot forces big screen U-turn for Champions League', www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article3936458.ece
- ¹⁵ 'Religion may significantly influence perceptions and experiences of crime and criminal justice and, as such, should be carefully considered by policy-makers and criminal justices and voluntary agencies when responding to both the perpetrators and victims of crime.' (Spalek 2002: 6)
- ¹⁶ For different approaches concerning criticism of essentialist views of Islam and culture see Modood 1998; Grillo 2003; Matin-Asgari 2004 and Geaves 2005.
- ¹⁷ Unfortunately, because of their target audience and lack of academic standard, books such as Phillips (2006) and others (see for instance Spencer 2005, 2007; Ye'or 2005) are not often reviewed and discussed among scholars; therefore, they remain largely unchallenged in their main assumption that Islamic extremism is a product of Islam as a religion and its main religious text, the Qur'an, which is, even on occasion, compared to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1933). Yet the emphasis on the role that the main Islamic holy text plays in the formation of extreme political ideas, particularly in the form of strict structuralism, is certainly not an innovation of this populist, right-wing literature that aims to capitalise upon the September 11 tragedy.
- ¹⁸ For a discussion of my use of the term 'feeling to be' and my theory of identity, see Chapter 3 in Marranci 2006.

Chapter 3

Excluded and Borderline Lives: Crime and Existential Fear

As many before it, this was just another ordinary day and yet another warmly anticipated kebab in a cold Yorkshire winter. Looking for lunch while waiting for my next meeting with one of the boys who had agreed to discuss his experience of crime and prison with me, I spot an inviting small kebab shop and hastily make my way towards it. I am the only customer at that time of the day as kebab is more popular in the evening. Behind the counter, a smiling but clearly bored man starts to ask me questions while I eagerly devour the succulently stuffed pitta. After guessing that I was not 'British' and discovering that I am Italian, we exchange some comments about Italian football and continue with our respective culinary tasks: the shopkeeper is preparing lunch for himself while I am busily finishing mine. I was about ready to leave when the shopkeeper, whom I had come to know is named Hafeel, smiled to me again and invited me to share some spicy food from his plate, joking that I will have to offer him a pizza when he comes to Florence, a place he would like to visit. Trapped by his kindness, although feeling quite full, I try, as slowly as possible, to share some of his food. We speak a lot during the slow competition of attempting to leave as much food as we can to each other.

Hafeel learns that I have moved from Scotland to Bradford as part of my research with young troubled Muslims and that I planned to visit some Muslim prisoners in the local prison. 'You are in the right place, man,' he says between one morsel of pitta and another, 'there are a lot of things going on here. Just keep your eyes open and you will see them; you know, when you work in this kind of shop you hear lots of stories.' Hafeel provides me with some examples, but it is what he tells me later attracts my attention:

You see, you know what happened here [looking at me with an inquisitive glance] . . . right? Here there have been the riots . . . right? Well, look

around, there is not one trace left of it. It is the past, ok? But look, for them [i.e. White British people and politicians] we are still the ones who took part in the riots. We cannot free ourselves from it . . . everything changes, but those stupid riots, the work of a couple hundred hot heads, are a stain. Now, look, I am saying, look around and see – the riots did lots of bad things, ok? But here, we do not have riots everyday. We have crimes, the same fucking crimes you find in other areas; you know, like lots of drugs, prostitutes, cars stolen and then burnt and of course fights. These things happen everyday and nobody cares. Everybody speaks about the riots as if they were some kind of serious revolt or insurrection, right? They were just kids, stupid ones . . . they did not even know what they were doing: many just blindly joined in what was going on. Here, crime is not just among kids: it is organised and there are different things going on . . . so, isn't this worse than riots? You do not live with riots, they come and go, but you have to live with crime every day of your life. But you see, much of the crime going on is between Asians, so if they don't touch the Whites, nobody really cares. I think that we need another good riot . . . so at least then they will keep things in order for a while here.

I found Hafeel's comments very interesting. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the majority of academic articles emphasised the riots as a breaking point in the passive attitude of Asians, or as one of the milestones along the way to a bigger issue, a dark shadow which would go on to manifest itself during the 7/7 attacks (see Macey 2007, Din and Cullingford 2006; Din 2006). The main issue is that much of the debate has turned political and, though there are some relevant political issues, this over focus has affected social scientific analysis. One of the major overlooked issues affecting the contemporary Pakistani community, and which we will discuss later, is a considerable generation gap which is often today turning into a, frequently unnoticed, conflict (Din 2006).

However, what remains still very much understudied and unexplored is the complexity and diversity of Muslims in the United Kingdom. Although Pakistanis account for 1.2 per cent of the population and make up 43 per cent of Great Britain's Muslims, with Bangladeshis numbering 16 per cent, the remaining 41 per cent of Muslims are neither: they are Indians (8.3 per cent), Black Africans (6.1 per cent) and White British (4 per cent) among others.¹ Indeed, if we break down some of the 'Other' category of the Census 2001, we observe that, according to Peach's analysis (2006: 632–3), White Muslims in England and Wales number around 179,000 (altogether about 12 per cent of the Muslim population!), and,

beyond the 4 per cent of White British, we find Bosnian, Albanian and Kosovan (about 60,000), Kurdish, Turkish and North African (about 36,000) as well as Middle Easterners (about 93,000). Notwithstanding this diversity, academic studies have focused mainly on Pakistanis and, though less, Bangladeshis. This is particularly true as far as crime is concerned (Alexander 2004), so that the 'Gang' is often represented as Asian, and in particular Bangladeshi (Alexander 2000). Therefore, the risk, even in academic studies, is to end in studying the stereotype instead of the reality.

The ethnic composition of Muslims in prison does not mirror the ethnic reality of the overall Muslim population in the United Kingdom. For example, Black male Muslims represent about 34 per cent of the Muslim prison population and despite Black Caribbean Muslims accounting for only 0.29 per cent of Muslims in the United Kingdom, 19.16 per cent were in prison in the year 2000. Asians were not the majority of those detained, and Pakistanis not the majority, as we shall see, of those arrested. The main reasons for this difference between statistical actuality and the situation portrayed in recent, mainly Asian-centric, scholarly debate about Muslims and crime is political: a debate over the existence of a 'clash of civilisations' (Huntington 1996), which, in the case of Britain, takes the form of a discussion about the existence of a 'clash of values'.

In addressing, and assessing, the experience of current and former Muslim prisoners and the risk of radicalisation, we need first to avoid the generalisation and essentialist approach which are very common in the mass media or in certain academic studies (e.g. Macey 1999a, 1999b, 2002 and 2007). As an anthropologist, I think that this means to use methodologies such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, and also to have a clear idea of the general picture that we may have through the existing – though often incomplete and otherwise flawed – statistics. Therefore, I shall first offer a short glimpse of the ethnic composition of the Muslim communities and their religious traditions, and then their socio-economic status. This provides us with a picture which may help us to understand the reality of Muslims who commit crimes. Yet this understanding cannot be achieved solely, as often happens, through the faceless percentages of official statistics. For this reason, I will concentrate, though briefly, on the stories and experiences of young Muslims who have committed crimes or may be considered 'at risk' of, potentially, committing crimes. We will observe and discuss, first, the case of those who have committed what we can define as 'ordinary' crimes, including those that are 'gang' related. Then, I will focus on those individuals, or group members, who, because of a certain Islamic ideology, have committed (in the case of prisoners) or are

prone to commit crimes such as ‘cyber-terrorism’ as well as ‘glorification of terrorism’, or have supported, albeit not publicly, extremist groups (Marranci 2009, 2007). In conclusion, I will suggest that to comprehend the reasons behind an extraordinary increase of Muslims in prison, we have to observe, on the one hand, their socio-economic and political environment beyond the cultural stereotypes that have been often reproduced, and on the other, the individual (Rapport 2003). Only then can we be able to assess the role of the group and its influence.

Environment and Criminality

The majority of studies within criminology as well as sociology (see for instance Hawkins 2003) suggest that socio-economic deprivation, which also affects the level of education, are mainly responsible for criminal behaviour, especially among young offenders. Although this should not be considered as the only factor, I suggest that it is important, for our study, to be carefully aware of the difficulties which Muslims face today within the wider British society. In fact, if we analyse the England and Wales Census 2001 by focusing on religion and ethnicity (Dobbs et al. 2006), we can easily observe that the overall economic and social status of Muslims, and in particular when Asian, Black Caribbean and Black, has, in all aspects, worsened since the 1990s. As we have discussed in the Introduction, Muslims in the United Kingdom have the youngest population, so that, accordingly, today more than half (55 per cent) of the Pakistani population in Great Britain has been born in the United Kingdom. As of 2001, an astonishing 35 per cent of Pakistanis were under 16 years, with the median age for both men and women being 22 years. The Bangladeshi population is even younger, with 38 per cent under 16 years, and the Black African population, which comprises about 6 per cent of the UK Muslim population, was slightly older with 30 per cent being younger than 16. As discussed by Webster (1997) and recently Spalek (2002), the young age of the Muslim population may have a great impact on offences and incarceration rates since the age group in which a majority of crimes are committed is between 14 and 23 (Conway 1997).

Geographically, Muslim communities tend to live in the most deprived areas of the most populated cities in the United Kingdom. When observing the household, although Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi Muslims tend to have very stable marriages, Black African as well as Black Caribbean Muslims showed somewhat less stability within the family, including some

single parent families. Yet Muslims, of any ethnic origin, tend to have the largest households because, in particular, of the number of dependent children. Yet Muslim households were also the most likely to be living in socially rented² accommodation (28 per cent of the Muslim population). Indeed, 20 per cent of Pakistanis, 63 per cent of Bangladeshis, as well as 57 per cent of Black Africans are living in socially rented houses. It should be noted that the period from 1991 to 2001 has witnessed the greatest decrease of Pakistanis owning their own home: a decrease of 9 per cent with a proportional increase of those living in socially rented accommodation, showing a dramatic fall in the economic status of the community. This is not, as Macey (2002) has suggested, the result of believing in Islam, but rather the result of a young generation which is struggling, as we shall see, to even maintain the economic level of their parents. Discrimination certainly plays a great role, as the statistics on education and employment can demonstrate. Nevertheless, my research has shown an existing relationship between deprivation and religiosity. As in many other religions, people tend to become more religious or turn towards religious practice when facing difficulties (Zwingmann and Murken 2000). Due to the circumstances, I am not surprised that young Muslims, who suffer a regrettably high level of social and economic disadvantages, are becoming increasingly 'pious'.

One of the consequences of a large household in socially rented accommodation is overcrowding; something that I have witnessed quite often among the Muslim families with whom I conducted my research. Overcrowding is, indeed, very visible among Bangladeshi (44 per cent) and Black African families (42 per cent) which are seven times more likely to live in overcrowded conditions than a White British family. Overall, Muslim households are most likely to be overcrowded (30 per cent). An interesting aspect is that, in the Census 2001, this was true even in the case of White British Muslims, so that 2 families in 10 were overcrowded compared to 1 in 20 in the instance of a White British Christian household. Again, some scholars may be tempted to adduce the overcrowding to the 'patriarchal' structure of Muslim families or to religious values. In reality, my research has suggested that economic issues have enormously contributed to the overcrowding, with situations as straightforward as married couples being forced to live with their in-laws.

During an extended period of fieldwork with Muslims living in overcrowded accommodation, I noticed that at first they used to justify their, often distressful, situation through religious reasons; yet longer acquaintance revealed a very different picture, as Hamid, who was living with his wife and his parents, his married brother and children as well as one cousin,

illustrated, 'I am not happy with the situation, it is less than viable and my wife complains a lot. If I could, I would leave tomorrow. But can I? So, I try to convince myself that at least living together is a very Islamic thing to do.' Hamid has tried to take a positive view of what the majority would see as a symbol of economic deprivation. Another similar situation, in which religion is used to 'make sense' of one's difficult reality, is the case of the elderly.

Although it is true that Muslims tend to show deep respect for elderly parents who will often be cared for within the family, religious piety is not the main motivation for the majority who provide such care. Again my research has revealed another reality which social scientists have apparently thus far ignored. I have noticed that the decision to commit parents to a nursing home was not remarkably uncommon for second-generation Muslim middle-class families. Again, extreme culturalist conclusions, according to which Muslims behave in a certain way because of Islam, seem to be dangerously reductive when carefully explored. As we shall see more than once in this book, the mentioning of Islam does not automatically mean that is in fact the main motivating factor behind actions and decisions made by Muslims, as choices may in reality be dictated by social and economic constraints.

Certainly, one of the main causes for which the socio-economic status of Muslims in the United Kingdom is often disadvantaged, if, for example, compared with those of American Muslims, may be found in the high level of unemployment among Bangladeshis, Black Africans, and Pakistanis. In addition, a lack of education often affects the level of employment or the nature of employment. Among all the religious communities, 33 per cent of Muslim households with dependent children had no adults in employment. Indeed, 34 per cent of the Bangladeshi, Black African and 28 per cent of the Pakistani families had no working adults. This rather depressing picture becomes clearer when we observe the unemployment rate in each age group. Overall unemployment rates among Muslims, in 2001, were more than double than those of any other group (17 per cent). Between the ages of 16 and 17, young Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African men had an unemployment rate that was double (above 40 per cent, also for women) than that of their White British peers, and no better was the situation for the 18–24 age group with a 20 per cent unemployment rate for both men and women compared with 11 per cent among their White British peers. Hence, the unemployment rate for Muslims was extremely high.³ The census also provides very important data for our subsequent analysis: Muslims born in the United Kingdom have an even higher

rate of unemployment than those born overseas. For instance, in the 16–24 age group, UK-born Pakistanis have a 10 per cent higher unemployment rate than those Pakistanis who were born overseas.

Unemployment affects, however, not only Muslims who have little education but also those who possess a university degree, so that, statistically, a degree, or equivalent qualification, provides fewer advantages to Muslims than to other groups. Hence, among the 16–24 age group, Pakistanis possessing qualifications had an unemployment rate approximately three times than that of a White British peer (19 per cent against 6 per cent). In the other age groups, the rate was roughly double than that of White British people. Muslims, regardless of ethnicity, have also the highest level of unemployment among those with no qualifications (21 per cent). When we observe the average employment status, Muslims have the lowest proportion in managerial and professional occupations (32 per cent) and the highest in semi-routine and routine occupations (33 per cent).

The fact that, even among UK-born educated Muslims, unemployment is extremely high indicates that discrimination may be a serious cause. This inequality explains why fewer and fewer British Muslims, particularly Pakistanis, decide to obtain a qualification. One of my respondents, who has a doctorate in business and 3 years after his graduation was still trying to obtain a job within his field, observed, ‘You know, the reality is that this PhD has damaged me. I have spent so much time studying when in reality nobody wants me. And, it is clear that more than my being Paki, it is being Muslim that affects my chances. If I had decided to work, like many of my friends, instead of studying for a PhD, I would now be better off’ (Said, 31 years old).

The inequality does not stop at active production, housing and education, but affects also the physical health of the communities; though I do not have space to discuss this matter in detail here, the Muslim communities, and the various ethnic groups forming them, suffer in this crucial aspect (see Smith et al. 2000). In such a deprived status, after more than 50 years of living in and contributing to the UK society, should we be surprised, as some seem to be, that only 65 per cent of Muslims were ready to define their national identity as British, English, Scottish or Welsh?

Much of what we have observed in England and Wales is true for Scotland also, though, of course, the proportion of Muslims living in the country does not reach even 1 per cent. In Scotland live 42,600 Muslims, who account for 0.84 per cent of the Scottish population. Notwithstanding that Muslims account for less than 1 per cent of the population, their religion (Islam) is the most common faith after Christianity. Indeed, 45 per cent of

the non-Christian religious population is made up of Muslims. Like in England and Wales, the Scottish Muslim population is also the youngest, with 31 per cent aged under 16 years, though first generation migrants still account for 50 per cent of the Scottish Muslim community. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis form the great majority of the community (67 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively), with Africans and Arabs representing 15 per cent of the Muslim population, and Scottish converts less than 2 per cent. While in the rest of the United Kingdom we can find a statistically intriguing rate of inter-faith marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims, in Scotland Muslims have the highest rate of same-religion marriages (more than 80 per cent), as well as the highest rate of endogamy. This shows the integration process between the Muslim and non-Muslim populations to be very slow and behind the rate existing in England and Wales.

Muslim families in Scotland tend to have a higher number of children than their non-Muslim neighbours, with 34 per cent of Muslim families having three or more children. The majority of these families live in large urban areas, with Glasgow showing the largest Muslim population (42 per cent). Muslims tend to live, in the majority of cases, in the poorest areas of these cities, and, similarly to the situation in England and Wales, in overcrowded accommodation. While among the Muslim population there are a high number of students, the Muslim community has also the highest rate of adults without qualifications. Unsurprisingly, the Scottish Muslim community is affected by high unemployment, with only 52 per cent of its population being economically active. As in the case of England and Wales, as we have seen, the Scottish Muslim population in prison is, in proportion, higher than expected, and in this case with a clear majority of Asians. Hence, on average, of every 1,000 Muslims in Scotland, nearly 3 are detained⁴ in prison. This is a statistically significant number when compared to the general Scottish population, which sees about 1 individual⁵ in prison out of every 1,000. Whilst we ought to remember that these kinds of statistics, by their very nature, contain many errors and are imprecise, they nonetheless illustrate an alarming situation.

In addition to the above problems (see also Purdam et al. 2007) we have also to consider that Muslims, particularly Asians and Blacks, suffer an increasingly high level of racist, and often religiously aggravated, harassment and attacks, as well as discrimination. If we analyse the latest statistics provided by the Ministry of Justice under Section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 (Jones and Singe 2008) we can appreciate that between 2005/6 and 2006/7 there has been a 3.7 per cent increase in the number of racist incidents recorded,⁶ including an increase of 2.6 per cent in religiously

aggravated offences. It is important to notice that less than 1 per cent of the White population had been victims of racially motivated crimes, compared with 2 per cent of people from Asian and Black backgrounds. Furthermore, where the victim was of an ethnic minority group, 54 per cent of the offenders were White, while in the case of racist attacks against White victims, 89 per cent of the offenders were White.⁷ As we have seen, some authors in the previous chapter have argued that the tension existing between Asian Muslims and the Police in certain areas has facilitated both the riots in 1995 and 2001. It is important to highlight that during the 'War on Terror', Muslim communities, particularly when Asian, have received inordinate attention under the 'stop and search' legislation,⁸ such that Asian individuals were twice as likely as White persons to be stopped and searched, though in the case of Black people, the likelihood jumped to seven times that of their White neighbours.

Although there is no clear indication of religion recorded, research suggests that a relevant number of Black Muslims have also been stopped, particularly under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000. An attentive reading of the statistics shows that 'stop and search' powers have resulted in very few arrests and even fewer convictions (see Jones and Singe 2008, table 4.3), especially in the case of crimes related to terrorism. It is evident, also from statistical data, that Muslim communities are under pressure, both from an increase of racism as well as what I can call a generalised social distrust and suspicion aroused inevitably by terrorist attacks such as 7/7 and the failed plot of 21/7 in the United Kingdom as well as others worldwide. Some of the statistics may also suggest that Asian and Black people tend to be arrested more easily, and with less evidence, by the police than White people. Indeed, nearly twice the number of Asian defendants is committed to trial (33 per cent) when compared with White defendants (17 per cent), however a lower proportion of Asian offenders (8 per cent) received a custodial sentence. The same can be observed in the case of the Crown Courts: for example, although a higher proportion of Asians were referred, 75 per cent of White defendants were found guilty compared to 69 per cent of Asian defendants⁹ (Bridges 2000; Shute et al. 2005).

Undeniably, these data raise concerns about the level of discrimination that Muslims of various origins suffer because of their ethnicity and/or religion. Yet while conducting my fieldwork in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the United Kingdom, although many complained about racism, Islamophobia and institutional discrimination, my respondents expressed, like Hafeel above, their anxiety and distress regarding their own community and the level of criminality (especially drug related) existing

within it. As one Pakistani father, living in Leeds, told me, 'if anyone will one day take the life of my son, it will not be a policeman, nor a White racist, but rather one of our own. I know that and I pray each day that this will not happen.' Crime statistics show that in instances of homicide in which the victim was Asian, the perpetrator was, in 54 per cent of the cases, an Asian himself. This confirms that it is ordinary crimes, and especially those that are 'gang' related, that most affect both the Pakistani and other Muslim communities in the United Kingdom.

Between 2006 and 2007 the number of Asian people arrested has increased by 5 per cent. The statistics available for 2006/7 have confirmed what I have learned from my fieldwork about the nature of most recurrent offences among Muslims, particularly when of Asian origin. Drugs remain the main issue for the community; for example, among Whites, drug offences account for 13 per cent of all crimes, while among Asians, especially those of Pakistani origin, 18 per cent of crimes are drug related. Other crimes which are highly common among Asian communities, and often gang related, are violence against persons (nearly 19 per cent), fraud and forgery (14 per cent, in contrast to 4 per cent among Whites), and 'other indictable offences' (numbering 21 per cent)¹⁰ which include gun and knife possession. The typologies of crimes committed and the reasons behind them provide us with data which may help to avoid stereotyped answers to the question of why crime is rising among Muslims of various ethnic origins as well as yield a new understanding of the issue.

Young Muslims, Generation Gaps and Criminal Experiences

The overall picture provided above shows the extreme difficulties that Muslims, as Pakistanis, Indians, Blacks, Arabs and Whites face. Of course, a majority of Muslims in the United Kingdom is Pakistani or Bangladeshi, and so are many of the mosques and Islamic centres. Asian Islam, and its various expressions, has a particular relevance to the status of Islam, as religion, in the United Kingdom. Today we can perhaps say that Muslims in the United Kingdom, especially if UK-born, suffer from the same shattered myths and hopes as the previous, mainly immigrant, generation did. To understand the disillusionment process that affects Muslims in the United Kingdom, we should understand where the majority came from and the context in which the new generations have grown up. Indeed, the historical relationship between them and the United Kingdom has been

heavily marked by colonialism and colonial dynamics. India¹¹ was the ‘Jewel in the Crown’ of the British Empire. Racial ideologies and religious profiles were very common during that time, and the colonial power perceived the Hindu population as being more Western-oriented than their Muslim neighbours.

Colonialism is embedded in the memories of both the first and second generations (Marranci 2006). Even after their home countries achieved independence, ties with the British Empire, or what was left of it, remained particularly strong. Thus, after the Second World War, Muslims coming from South Asian countries became part of the British proletariat. Yet the relationship between White workers and Pakistani Muslims, in particular, was not easy. Discrimination pushed these new migrants towards an increasing isolation within working-class neighbourhoods that were depopulated of their original White population, who meanwhile could afford better locations (Lewis and Schnapper 1994). This facilitated the reconstruction of internal community dynamics and friction that still marks the South Asian Muslim community. It is within these dynamics that the *biraderi* (kin group) became essential for the survival of the family and helped to maintain close connections with their village of origin. Indeed, ‘the continued connection with “home” remains strong, particularly among the first immigrants, for example in terms of sending remittances, contact with relatives and the building of family homes. For the vast majority of older Pakistanis this is and will remain only a sentimental attachment to “home” (Pakistan). It is understandable that they have maintained links with Pakistan. The question is whether the next generation will adhere to this’ (Din 2006: 34). My research suggests that young Muslims, especially those of South Asian origin, have increasingly shifted their sense of belonging from their parents’ home to Islam, so that the *biraderi* system tends to be substituted by an, often utopian, idea of Muslim ummah (see Marranci 2009, 2008b, 2006). Iaqub, a 22-year-old man of Pakistani origin, illustrated this point to me in Leeds,

I really do not understand why I should send money, or spend money to visit, relatives in the village [in Pakistan] when I really don’t know who they are. I mean, this is a cultural thing . . . you know all that *biraderi* stuff, but we are Muslims and our money should go where Muslims need. Sometimes I wonder whether the Pakistani community [in the UK] is not well off because of this money going to people abroad who don’t even need it – but we send it anyway because they are ‘family’. I think that we need to be more Muslim now, rather than being just Pakistani.

Iaqub is not the only one to express this rejection of the 'old' tradition. Yet we can observe also an internal religious shift. In contrast to the first South Asian migrants who were mainly Barelvis and Deobandis, with sectarian tensions existing in Pakistan between the two movements following them to the United Kingdom (see, Werbner 2002), young generations are shifting to a more 'Arab' version of Islam, especially Wahabi and Salafi movements and sects (Kibria 2007).

These differences between the immigrant generation and their offspring have deepened the normal conflicts existing between the two sides of any generation gap (Din 2006; Spalek 2002; Ansari 2004). Although we cannot adduce, as some do, the increase in criminality within Muslim communities to merely a difficult generation gap, surely it has an impact on emotions¹² and feelings. An important indication of this generation gap appears in the case of the religious education of young Muslims.

Two institutions are normally responsible for the Islamic education of Muslim children: the family and the mosque, through the so-called madrasa that is often organised on the weekend. As I had occasion to observe during my fieldwork in Italy, France, Northern Ireland and Scotland, madrasas (religious schools) organised in European mosques follow the same teaching methodologies and curricula, which are generally borrowed from Islamic countries (see also Strijp 1998). As a part of my fieldwork, during the past 10 years, I have interviewed children attending madrasas: the youngest through group interviews and the teenagers with in-depth interviews. In many cases the 'Sunday school' organised at the mosque was akin to a simplified version of a typical madrasa in many Islamic countries. It focused on Islam as theology instead of Islam as a part of the children's everyday life. The teaching methodology faithfully followed the practice of textual memorisation. Teachers often did not answer students' questions since the questions were considered a mere distraction from the main task: parroting the teacher's recitation of the Qur'an. In a few instances, moderate physical punishment was used to penalise repeated mistakes, disruption of classes, or even as a 'mnemonic aid' to memorise the Qur'an. Students, some as young as 11, were very critical of the traditional mosque madrasa. As a 14-year-old boy of Pakistani origin observed,

We speak some Urdu at home, and I can just barely understand it, but nobody speaks Arabic. I don't know what I am reciting at the madrasa, and really, I am only coming here because my father thinks that if I don't, people might speak behind our back. I don't like coming here, I have already to work hard for school; I would prefer something very different,

like I prefer to play with my friends. This imam comes from Pakistan and he cannot even speak to me correctly: what I can learn from him? Many of my friends have left. They lie to their parents, and instead of coming here they go play football. But I really cannot upset my mother because she would cry so . . . I am here . . . but look, it is really useless.

It is not a surprise that, as we shall see, the majority of the Muslim prisoners who ended in prison for the first time between the ages of 14 and 16, often then becoming persistent criminals, stopped attending the mosque madrasa between 10 years of age and 13. Saad, a former prisoner aged 22, who spent 3 years in prison for drug-related crimes observed during one of our interviews,

Maybe I am gonna tell you an exaggeration, brother, but I ended up in prison because of the madrasa. I mean, if it were interesting, I would not have tried to mix with those gora [who were] older than me, and you know, sniffing glue and then taking other things and doing stupid things with other Pakis after that. The madrasa was hell, man. The imam used a stick and if you were a bit stupid and making fun . . . we got a whack on our arm or wherever he could get us; then home . . . the bastard told the parents each time and my parents were like traditional, like living in the village, you know? Well, my father beat the shit out of me all the time for nothing. I wanted to escape but also to feel strong and better about me, you know . . . and girls, cars, things like that which make others think you are cool.

Saad's experience is a common one, at least among many of my respondents who have experienced prison or committed crimes. It is a clear generation gap in which tradition, which is often perceived by the young generation as distant and irrational, collides with young Muslims' integration within an urban and underprivileged space. Indeed, the overall majority of the Muslims I have interviewed in prison reported a conflictual relationship even with their religion: Islam. Shahid, a 27-year-old former prisoner, of Bangladeshi origin, recalls,

When I was younger and started committing crimes – in the beginning, small theft for buying cigarettes and pot – I had a very strange relationship with Islam. I was Muslim because I was a Bengali man and not White. Yet I did not practise: I even drank sometimes, but never ate pork. Uhhh . . . yeah, Islam was more not eating pork and fighting BNP with the gang.

I ended in prison because of a fight. But, I didn't deserve it really. I was not a good Muslim, but prison . . . it is the place that sentenced me, not the judge . . . it was being here, being part of this place, this neighbourhood. This was my crime and the crime of many like me.

There has been a long and heated debate, both academically and politically, about the integration of new Muslim generations (Pauly 2004; Brighton 2007; Abbas 2007). Yet if my research has taught me something, it is that, in reality, Muslims of various ethnic origins and backgrounds are actually integrating, but not within an Andersonian (1991) abstract dimension of national community. Instead, the integration occurs within the local, and even the micro-local, dimension of everyday life. I have provided a quite detailed description of the socio-economic realities with which many Muslims live in the United Kingdom, and it is not difficult to conclude that instead of being able to integrate into safe and prosperous neighbourhoods, they are often situated within highly underprivileged environments that are affected by both social dysfunction and crime. It is perhaps to be expected that, when compared proportionally to the population, the instances and typology of crimes are very similar between non-Muslim Whites and Muslims, especially when Asian.¹³ Difficult urban spaces have an impact upon the crime level in the general population. Muslims tend, however, to be more vulnerable because of the rejection that they often receive from mainstream society, mainly because of their ethnic and/or religious identities. This not only affects men, but also Muslim women, and especially those of British Black, African-Caribbean and Somali origins. Aisha, for example, is 19 years old and the daughter of a single parent African-Caribbean family. She has spent nearly 2 years in a young offenders' institution for what she defines as 'gang related' crimes, which also involved drugs. She recalls her experience before prison,

I was a teenager, a difficult one; I had only my mother, and she had her problems. I was left by myself, and started having sex at a very young age. Why did I do it? I liked to be wanted, desired, and to be sexy, though my sexual experiences were often very unpleasant. A couple of years later, I became pregnant but lost my baby. I then started to use drugs and have boyfriends linked to gangs. I was just one of many teenagers in that place, really. There, if you do not have sex and have a boyfriend with a gun, you are nothing. I am Muslim, and was Muslim, but religion at that time was something in the background, something to use when you need . . . maybe for confrontation – to create barriers and justify fights. It is a reason like

any other for forming groups . . . like yeah . . . we are all Muslims. I really did not think about it. I just wanted to be successful among my mates. Crimes, at that time I thought, make you somebody, you know, people think that you are dangerous and you feel kind of stronger, but in my case it was more following the pack; they do it, I do it.

Again we can observe a link between criminal behaviour and the place where these young Muslims have grown up. Religion is in the background, as one respondent of Arab origin, who use to deal with drugs pointed out,

We were young, and I was lucky since I never ended up in prison or killed, but religion is just not cool when you are young. There are exceptions, sure, but not for people like us, coming from the place you have seen. Sure, you can have a cross around your neck or, if Muslim, some beard, but that is style, yeah? I never really believed. I was Muslim because people said so and many used to call me Saddam [a reference to Saddam Hussein the former Iraqi dictator], and I felt like, 'yeah okay bastard, you can call me Saddam, bastard kafir!' You see, it was more language and showing off than actually religion. I did not care and nobody I knew really did, until September 11th . . . that changed things. (Sharif, 30 years old, Egyptian origin)

Many of my respondents have made similar statements about religion. Among Asians, Islam often remains an attribute linked to ethnicity and family, 'you are from a Pakistani family; so you are Muslim and people will see you like that.' I have noticed, instead, that Arabs involved in criminal activity rarely mentioned Islam other than when a specific question forced them to reflect on it. In these cases, the respondent, with a clear fatalistic attitude generally admitted that s/he was a bad Muslim, such as in the case of 24-year-old Faruq, who was of Algerian origin, 'I know that I am a bad Muslim because I do those things. I really try hard to avoid, but I cannot. Allah is the most compassionate and knows the best. I hope to free myself from this [drug] sin and then go to Hajj, so that my sins will be washed away.' In other cases, such as Black African and Black Caribbean Muslims who are involved in crime (often gang related), Islam remains unmentioned also and if challenged on the topic, the response was often that they saw themselves as Blacks and that was the main aspect of their identity, which included, among a majority of my sample, membership of specific gangs.

As Sharif has illustrated above, something changed after 9/11. During my research, I have noticed two major changes: the introduction of religious

rhetoric among some offenders aged between 14 and 26 years, and the emergence of young educated Muslims who have committed what I call 'ideological crimes' but who otherwise would have never been at risk. These crimes are often linked to post-9/11 terrorist legislation or to restricted interpretations of existing legislation. Being that the specific topic of terrorism or terrorist-related crimes is not the focus of this book, I have no space here to discuss in detail this kind of crime, such as the offence of 'glorifying terrorism' (Wolfendale 2007), or what now is known as 'cyber-terrorism' (Croft 2007). Yet since some of my respondents in prison were charged and sentenced – some for lengthy periods of time – for precisely such crimes, and then often described as a major 'risk' factor for the radicalisation of other prisoners, I will briefly report the pre-prison experience of one of them and the reasons adduced to his criminal behaviour.

Ajaz,¹⁴ a young student of Pakistani origin, was arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000 for downloading, sharing and uploading terrorist material, mainly videos produced by Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Before his arrest, Ajaz was a good student and enjoyed life. Although he felt to have a strong Muslim identity, he did not practise all aspects of Islam, particularly regular prayers. Nobody would have defined him as an extremist or particularly pious person. Ajaz was interested in politics and had his own opinions about international issues such as Palestine, but never appeared to support violent acts. He took part in the antiwar demonstrations when the United Kingdom joined the United States as part of a coalition to invade Iraq. He was very confident that an elected government would listen to his people. Indeed, Ajaz became highly disappointed and upset when it appeared to him that they did not. He felt that the war against Iraq demonstrated that others were the reason behind the so-called war on terror. Event after event, including the Abu Ghraib scandal and the daily news reporting the effects of the offensive upon the Iraqi population, brought Ajaz to use the internet to find 'different sources of information'. It was not long before, jumping from link to link and from forum to increasingly restricted forum, he started to find videos and documents distributed by Al-Qaeda in Iraq. According to Ajaz, he was not aware that he was committing a crime by interacting within those extremist chat rooms and forums. He then started to reupload the videos he had collected in other forums and use increasingly violent rhetoric inviting people to join the 'insurgence against the Crusader'. This went on until the police raided his flat and he was arrested.

During the interview, I tried to understand the reasons for which he decided to support Al-Qaeda's views and use its rhetoric. He explained that he felt a connection with the people in Iraq and had lost confidence that

the Western world was capable of real justice. He defined his actions as ‘political’ rather than ‘religious’. It was clear that he did not perceive his actions to be criminal, but rather to be a kind of political challenge. He was at a critical point in his life; he had to decide what to do with it. Ajaz was certainly in a special psychological state that facilitated his adoption of a black and white, confrontational rhetoric, where the world can be simplified into ‘Muslims and Crusaders’. Indeed, Wiktorowicz (2005) has suggested that activists may decide to join an extremist Islamic group after experiencing a ‘cognitive opening’ resulting from a crisis that may have shaken their certainties. In certain cases, the ‘cognitive opening’ results in people seeking new answers to their existing questions and doubts (see Chapter 6 in this book).

Since, for some people, religion may begin to take on a new meaning due to a crisis, a ‘cognitive opening’ can push them to explore their religion beyond the usual mainstream forms. Wiktorowicz has also observed that ‘one common movement tactic for fostering a cognitive opening is the use of “moral shock”’ (2005: 21). I tend to agree with Wiktorowicz’s observations surrounding the phenomenon of the ‘cognitive opening’.¹⁵ At the same time, it is important to note that when he refers to ‘crises’ we should not think solely about dramatic and shocking events, such as traumas. More often than not, activists decide to join a specific Islamic fundamentalist or extremist group because of disillusion, frustrations and, increasingly, dystopia (Crook 2000; Marranci 2009).

In this section, we have observed that to link criminal behaviour to religion is misleading. Factors such as place, generation gap, group dynamics and political ideology facilitate – although not directly inducing criminality – the risk for young Muslims of various ethnic extractions to engage in criminal activities. In the case of Asians, the generation gap and the growing conflict between two different understandings of ‘being’ Asian have combined with the experience of racism, which since 9/11 often has an increasingly religious connotation. We have also observed that in many cases, Islam is part of a rhetoric, a discourse of identity (Marranci 2006) aimed, in certain cases, at widening the generation gap, maintaining boundaries and clarifying one’s position *vis-à-vis* the ‘global reality’.

Conclusions

Are Muslims more prone to crime? Is there today an increase of Muslim involvement in criminal behaviour? Does Islam have a, direct or indirect

(such as inducing poverty or imposing patriarchy), role in Muslims committing crimes and the consequent increase of Muslim prisoners? Is there a connection/relationship between common Muslim criminality and terrorism? These are some of the questions that I have been asked during interviews with journalists, politicians, students and also during some academic conferences. A minority of scholars such as Macey (2002, 2007) and many commentators (such as Robert Spencer 2005 and Melanie Philips 2006) have often replied positively to similar questions, thus adopting an extreme culturalist position in which symbols and concepts determine, or even control, human behaviour. I reject such positions (see also Marranci 2008a). Not only is the idea that Islam, as a religion, can induce or facilitate criminal behaviour faulty, but also the terminology 'Muslim criminals' (or for that matter, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Agnostic or Atheist criminals and so forth) makes little sense other than when the offenders define themselves as such. Allow me to provide an example from another research field: urology.

A recent study (Steggall et al. 2006), similar to Spalek's invitation within the field of criminology, has pondered whether religion may play an 'aetiological' factor in male sexual issues. Indeed, Muslims statistically appear to complain, more than other believers, about a physiologically unpleasant (if not embarrassing) issue: rapid ejaculation. Yet, while Muslims appear to suffer from rapid ejaculation, 51 per cent of Christians (against 29 per cent of Muslims) suffer from erectile dysfunction (Steggall et al. 2006: 434). Needless to say, some people may engage in Freudian analysis or cultural explanation, maybe even carefully checking the Bible and the Qur'an, Hadiths or Papal encyclicals to find the ultimate reasons behind such medical problems. Yet any rational, if not commonsensical, insight may suggest that reading the data through religion is as misleading as it is far-fetched. As the authors of the article have done in its conclusion, we can only reject such an approach and use better categories to understand the phenomenon. Hence, although today some seem unable to notice, to suggest that we need to pay particular attention to the role that Islam may have, directly or indirectly, on crime committed by Muslims is no different than to suggest that Christianity may somehow induce erectile dysfunction, or likewise, that Islam may be responsible in some way for rapid ejaculation.

It is my contention that criminality has no religion. What we call 'criminality', as defined by social rules, can only be understood as a *universal* human behaviour. It is a product of the relationship between a socio-cultural environment (defining the community rules)¹⁶ and an individual brain and its dynamics, such as psycho-cognitive factors of the people who

decide to break such norms. I suggest that analysing, as we have done, the environmental issues that Muslim communities face today in the United Kingdom and understanding some cognitive mechanisms which may be involved in facilitating criminal behaviour can explain the current reality.

Muslims are human beings. As such, they experience the world in exactly the same way any other human being does. Yet, many Muslims live in deprived and difficult socio-economic situations. For many of them, these socio-cultural and economic landscapes become a challenge to their aspirations, dreams and everyday life, which are consequently often heavily marked by disillusionment. This disillusionment can be the result of first-hand experience, but it can also be learned through the trials and let-downs of friends. As we have observed, the majority of Muslims committing crimes are between the ages of 14 and 28 years, and many are British-born which makes them statistically the most likely to be affected by negative socio-economic factors as well as racism and Islamophobia. Rotter (1966) has suggested that people, as part of their survival strategy, when facing difficult and unfamiliar situations rely on generalised expectancies such as *locus of control*. This may be perceived as internally induced, as a result of an active action derived from one's own strategy, or externally determined, as a result of events beyond the control of the individual, such as environmental constrictions or even bad luck. Walters (2000) has argued that offenders hold more external generalised expectancy than non-offenders, and that the main reason for this may be found in the impact of not only the location in which they live, but equally, in the relationship with parents and the parental strategy for discipline.

Unsurprisingly, Slaby and Guerra (1988) have suggested that aggressive and antisocial young people would easily endorse the idea that criminal behaviour can increase self-esteem and decrease negative social evaluation. In an environment such as that which we have described above, one's self-esteem is very much challenged and it is easy, in such a depressing reality, to develop increased external generalised expectancy. Yet the ground, for of course both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, is very fertile for attraction to criminal behaviour, especially at a vulnerable age, such as adolescence. Teenagers are especially reactive to existential fear. Existential fear, as any other fear, is the result of an evolutionary process and is a reaction to a threatening environment (Menzies and Clarke 1995). Walters (2000: 262) has noticed, 'an example of how fear may play an important role in crime development is provided by research exposing the presence of a robust relationship between negative emotionality (i.e. anxiety and fear) and delinquency apparently independent of variations in participant

age, gender, race or culture.’ Emotional frustration, lack of control over one’s reality, and threats to identity are all factors that induce existential fear in humans. Hence, as Mischel and Shoda (1995) have suggested, existential fear may be central to crime, as crime can be seen as an attempt to regain control over the threatening environment by increasing the sense of self-esteem and acting, though violently or against the law, to change negative external influences.

Here, we have observed and discussed some universal variables linked to how we, as humans, react to our environment and its challenges. Crime and criminal behaviour are complex phenomena, with many variables playing a contributing role. Certainly, only a single individual, and not a religion, is capable of making the decision to commit a crime. To blame Islam, or any other religion, for behaviours such as criminality means not only to ignore the agency of individuals, but also to disregard far more complex processes, many of which are based upon the relationship between a person and his or her environment. In conclusion, it is important to remember that in the following chapters we are not dealing with Muslim prisoners, but rather with human beings who were recognised as, or ‘felt to be’, Muslims (Marranci 2006, 2008b), and many of whom, as we shall discuss, rediscovered Islam, as either religion or identity or both, through the experience of prison as an emotional place.

Notes

¹ For reasons of consistency, I will follow the census terminology (such as Black African, White British, Asian and so forth, with the exception of when more specific data is available), as far as statistics are concerned, even though they are not precise.

² Council Housing.

³ About 45 per cent among the 16–17 age group, 26 per cent among the 18–24 age group and 15 per cent among the 25–39 age group.

⁴ Exactly 2.8 out of 1,000.

⁵ Exactly 1.3 out of 1,000.

⁶ However, as with most crime, the majority of racial incidents are not reported to the police.

⁷ For clarity, the definition of racism in the United Kingdom, since 1999, reads ‘A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person’ (Macpherson 1999).

⁸ Police officers have the power to stop and search individuals under a range of legislations, such as Section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE), Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, and Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

- ⁹ Of course, there are also other variables to take into consideration, such as the kind of offences for which the defendants are tried. Yet this cannot account for a 6 per cent difference.
- ¹⁰ Indictable offences are those crimes which are more serious and which are tried on indictment in the Crown Court by a judge and jury.
- ¹¹ Pakistan was partitioned from India in 1947.
- ¹² See Marranci 2008b and 2006 for my theory of identity and the usage of the word emotions and feelings.
- ¹³ For instance, analysing the statistics provided by the Ministry of Justice for 2006/2007 about the West Midlands, which has a very high Asian population (13.87 per cent), we can notice that for crimes most often linked to socio-economic deprivation in urban areas, White people and Asians have virtually the same rate of offences. For example, out of 1,000 White people in the region, about 1 per cent committed violence against the person, and the same rate of offence existed among Asians in the same location. Likewise, in the case of drugs, about 22 White people out of 1000 were involved, and an equal number of offenders existed among Asians.
- ¹⁴ Since there are few cases of 'cyber-terrorists' who were detained or sentenced to prison, respondents can be easily recognised despite pseudonyms. Hence, I will not disclose the age of these respondents.
- ¹⁵ For an interesting discussion of the relevance of what cognitive theories may have in the understanding of religion, see Whitehouse 2001, 2004, and Chapter 6 in this book.
- ¹⁶ Although the majority of laws are the product of distinct sociocultural environments, it is also true that some laws seem to have a certain universality (Penner 1997, 1998; Busey and Loftus 2007), and this raises questions over whether they are really based only on 'cultural' norms or, as in some cases, the distinction between culture and nature cannot be considered as a total chasm (Milton 2002; Ingold 1996).

Chapter 4

Bars, Fluorescent Lights and Alienation: 'The Torment of the Grave'

You cannot collect your thoughts, not even for one moment, as they clamour together in confused chaos. You are escorted through a door, down through the dungeon of the court, and before being finally led downstairs, you can only fleetingly glance at your visibly distressed family members. You are conscious of the sound of your own steps as you make your way towards an anonymous, yet somehow ominous, desk, where an officer will ask you some basic questions such as your name, surname, height, weight etc. After this formality, you are directed down another grimy, artificially lit corridor. There you will meet the first of your steely grey doors, which is opened to enclose and overwhelm you. You are 'inside', and this grim reality is hammered home when you hear the metallic clang of the door being slammed behind you. The room is small, about 10 feet by 5 feet, bleak and disheartening. Stains and graffiti on the walls are all you have for company.

Eventually, and with your mind ill at ease through waiting, the time arrives that your grey cage door is again opened. After meeting another officer, filling another form and being handcuffed, you are accompanied out of the building and into a white van with blacked out windows. Once inside, you are placed into a kind of cubicle where you can perceive other convicts within the van, but not see them. Although the window is blacked out, you can still see outside. During the journey towards prison, you experience unsettling feelings: fear of the unknown, depression, despair about what your family may think of you, and uncertainty as to when you may be able to see them again, or how. Some of them were crying when you left the court. You have let them down, and badly. You are going to prison: a place you have imagined, seen in films, laughed about, but still learned to fear. You have never been there before. It occurs to you that you will be entirely among strangers: who will be your friend, or more importantly, your enemy? You cannot help but dwell upon stereotyped images of violence and rape.

A spasm in your stomach: fear, though an unfamiliar fear. Perhaps you can recognise it, even felt it before: that mysterious kind of fear, mixed with wonder. It is like when, as a child, the lights were switched off in your bedroom and a slice of light followed the closing door until suddenly you were surrounded by darkness and silence, save for the sound of your own beating heart. But it is also like the first day of school, the tense anticipation of the unknown. Dying: you wonder if it is perhaps also somewhat like this. After all, like in death, you are leaving behind everything, and all will go on without you, while you are suspended in a limbo of slow, repetitive time. A bump in the road and you are shocked out of your reflections: you are still travelling and still isolated from the others travelling with you. Somebody is crying, but who you cannot know.

The Prison. You hope you are dreaming as the van you are in passes through a colossal, portcullis-like door that heralds the end of your freedom. Wondering how you may be (mis)treated and feeling disoriented amid the blur of handcuffs, orders, uniformed men and walls, you struggle for your last glimpse of 'the world'. Behind that immense wall of dirty red-brick blocks, your new home awaits you. You are now a part of a new, mysterious and frightening world.

Once accompanied inside, the acrid odours, neon lights, metallic sounds and heavy metal doors all remind you that you are not dreaming as you had hoped in the van. Though, at least the officers so far have behaved kindly towards you. You are tired and dream of a hot shower. Instead you are now in a room, waiting to be 'processed'. After yet more forms have been filled, you are moved again and told to wait for an officer to call you: there is one behind the desk, and one behind you. After a short wait, you are requested to hand over your clothes, which are registered together with your other possessions. Left with nothing but a shirt, without trousers or underwear, the officers proceed to check your mouth, the soles of your feet and then ask you to adopt a humiliating squatting position in order to check that you do not have drugs or weapons inside you. You feel humiliated and degraded and, despite the professionalism of the officers, it is the procedure itself that humiliates.

You are now in a suffocatingly small cupboard of a cubicle awaiting another call, this time to see a doctor. Again, more questions and forms. Finally, you are escorted to your first cell, where you are put under suicide watch. You do not know what to expect while you climb the ageing, chipped green metal stairs. The door of the cell is opened, and you find yourself caged again. The heavy metal door slams, and you notice that this cell is as small as the previous one at the courthouse, just about 5 paces by 3 paces,

and also the walls are similarly grim. On one side lies a single bed, and opposite to the bed and against the facing wall sits a small metal table and an equally small metal chair. Near the door, you find a washbasin and a toilet that is openly visible from outside your cell. This is prison life. You know that you will be soon moved from this particular cell if you behave. Yet the other cells, the officer has told you, are only just slightly better. You feel lonely, depressed and hopeless. You fall asleep with the knowledge that tomorrow will be the first of many similarly tailored tomorrows.

* * *

The above account has been formed from a collection of my respondents' experiences of entering prison for the first time after having been committed by a court. The different descriptions I have collected possess a degree of homogeneity in depiction of the emotionally powerful experience of initial incarceration, in which fear, wonder, objectification, disorientation, humiliation and claustrophobic physical sensations, together with a strong element of alienation and dreamlike experience, have been often reported. In this chapter, we will observe the experiences of adult and young Muslim male prisoners, as well as those of some female Muslim prisoners. I will focus on some issues that are linked to the impact that prison has on their emotional and psychological state. Being an anthropologist, I think that the best medium to aid the reader in understanding an experience, that otherwise for most of them would remain distant and unknown, is through narratives and especially the individual accounts of my respondents. Although two people cannot experience situations and environments in the same identical way, some physical, psychological, emotional and cognitive reactions to stimuli (the product of neuropsychological processes)¹ are universal. Thus, I shall briefly discuss these common effects of imprisonment below.

The Prison Experience: Between Deprivation and Survival

Prison is a micro-world with formal and informal social rules that differ from the everyday world outside (Unruh 1980; Strauss 1978). Many studies have tried to describe this social world (see for instance Foucault 1977; Hasaballa 2001; Bondeson 1989); however, Clemmer (1958) has provided one of the most influential analysis until today. He has suggested, in his book *The Prison Community*, that all prisoners undergo a process of

'prisonisation' in which, though slowly, the prisoner becomes part of the 'prison culture', first by initiation and then through acceptance, so that no prisoner can remain fully 'unprisonised'. The prisoner eventually adopts some inevitable aspects of prison culture, such as subordination to the establishment as well as to other more powerful prisoners, prison language and prison styles in general (way of eating, body language and so forth). This produces what Clemmer calls an 'inmate code' on which prisoner solidarity is based. Clemmer's study has inspired two models of prison adaptation: the so-called *deprivation model* and the *importation model*. While the former argues that 'prison culture' is the result of a collective response to the deprivation that prisoners have to face in the socio-cultural dimension of prison, the latter suggests that it is not just the difficulties that prisoners face during incarceration, but also, and more relevantly, pre-incarceration experiences that make each prisoner respond differently to 'prison culture' and its social system.

Although the importation model presents some valid points, I tend to agree with Jones and Schmid (2000) who have conducted an in-depth research on the experience of first-time inmates.² They have noticed,

our fieldwork corroborates much of what the traditional research on prison has documented, but our analysis suggests a different way of understanding changes in inmates' outlooks and behaviour. Rather than focusing on internal and external determinants of prison adaptation patterns, our analysis focuses instead on inmates' experiential realities and their orientations to the practical problems of everyday prison life to explain these changes. In contrast to most of the contemporary literature on prisons, consequently, we see inmates as more actively engaged in social life and social action as interpretative processes. (Jones and Schmid 2000: 4–5)

My own research has surely confirmed the agency, and often the individuality, of both my respondents and other prisoners during the many hours I was allowed to not only observe, but also partake in their activities (mainly religious, educational and associational).

One common experience of being incarcerated is disorientation: 'I felt like I was an alien. I didn't know anybody and nobody knew me' (Samir, 21 years old, Algerian). Rarely do people ever find themselves with such a total lack of resources or point of reference. This is especially true for Muslim prisoners from Asian backgrounds, where family and kinship support is often extremely strong and rarely denied (Din 2006). The lack of

support and familiarity appears particularly traumatic to the first-time prisoner since s/he will enter prison with, rather than a frank representation of it in mind, a collection of – perhaps disquieting – images of what it may be like (Jones and Schmid 2000). The offender may have been very aware that s/he could be arrested and sentenced to prison, and hence had much time to imagine such reality. Films, tele-dramas (see Mason 2003; O’Sullivan 2001; Herman 2003) as well as the anecdotes of friends often provide much of the imaginary material, ‘I imagined prison to be like the one you see in American films, such as Sing-Sing, where you just have bars and everybody can see you at all times, even when you go to the toilet’ (Shaid, 19 years old, of Pakistani background). Yet some of my respondents have also described the days leading up to their incarceration as a ‘dream’, or ‘nightmare’, from which they hoped to awake. Jones and Schmid have noticed in their research the same effect, so that, ‘for many felons, the preprison image also seems to be, in some respect, *illusory* – a quality that is undoubtedly related to both the intangibility of the image and the emotional impact of arrest, court appearances and sentencing. The preprison image conflicts so sharply with the individual’s assumptions about reality and about his own identity – and in this sense violates what Schutx called the reciprocity of perspectives – that it appears to be dreamlike’ (Jones and Schmid 2000: 24–5).

Part of the expectation about prison life is violence: from verbal abuse to physical attack, and also the much-feared sexual assault. Indeed, as also my research has confirmed, violence, in its different forms, and the loss of control over one’s life remain among the main factors of anxiety that all prisoners face. A young Muslim offender recalled, ‘I am here and you see, they can do whatever they want to me. I am nothing. I mean, I am just a number; nobody cares. It is full of violence here. You see it everyday, and often you can’t escape it.’ We shall see that, in the case of some Muslim prisoners, this fatalistic attitude towards everyday life in prison has significant consequences for their interpretation of Islam not only as a religion but also, though to a smaller extent, as an ideology. Despite the effort of the Prison Services, victimisation of prisoners by both fellow inmates and unprofessional staff is not a myth, but rather an unfortunately inevitable reality (see Adams 1994; Porporino et al. 1987; Lockwood 1980). Killias (1990) has observed that fear results from some distinct variables, such as exposure to a risky and threatening environment, loss of control over events, situations and places, and the prediction of serious consequences; unquestionably, prison is saturated with all these elements. During my research, I noticed that Muslims appeared to experience a higher level of

fear (see also Beckford et al. 2005), especially when incarcerated for the first time. However, this is not surprising because Muslims may suffer victimisation not only because of their religion but also because of their ethnic background; therefore, they have an increased likelihood of being verbally or physically abused when compared to Black Christians, for example. Furthermore, the HM Prison Inspector's annual report for 2006/7 demonstrated that 40 per cent of Muslim prisoners, compared with 22 per cent of non-Muslims, claimed to have been victimised by prison staff.

Needless to say, fear, and especially fear of victimisation, affects social interaction among prisoners as well as between prisoners and prison officers. Nevertheless, the main impact is on the prisoners themselves and the way that they will develop their worldviews, an activity in which emotions are extremely involved. Unfortunately, the topic of fear and its role in prison largely remains understudied. O'Donnell and Edgar (1999) have carried out a cross-sectional study of violence and victimisation based on two adult prisons (Bullington and Wellingborough) and two young offenders' institutions (Feltham and Huntercombe) in England. One of the main findings was that 'most inmates had, in the previous month, witnessed criminal victimisation (assault) and incivility (verbal abuse) and a high proportion had themselves been assaulted or verbally abused' (1999: 97).

Prison violence is a reality and prisoners form strategies to cope with it. One of these strategies, according to the authors' study, is 'inmate solidarity'. They found that a large proportion of prisoners in all institutions had strong beliefs that fellow prisoners would intervene to protect them. Although the study showed that in the case of juvenile prisons, slightly more than a third expected that the prison staff would protect them, this number dropped to less than 20 per cent in the case of adult prisons. As we shall discuss later regarding the case of Muslim prisoners, the trust that prison officers will act to defend them is even weaker, replaced by a greater conviction that fellow Muslims, regardless of ethnicity, will stand up to help their brothers or sisters.³

Fear becomes a part of prisoners' everyday life, as does the feeling of loss. Prisoners entering incarceration find themselves severed from their family, friends and loved ones. Forcefully removed from their emotional network, including in many cases, partners and children, prisoners have to cope with this unusual emotional deprivation, 'I lost all the people I love. I cannot hug them, kiss them – they are distant voices. Nothing left: year after year some will forget me. I am like in a grave' (Rachid, 24 years old, of Black African origin). This loss of affection, including sexual intimacy, has an extreme effect on identity, memory and the overall behavioural spectrum

of prisoners. In addition, one of the questions that first-time prisoners beginning their incarceration ask themselves is an existential one: 'will I survive?'

Survival is an instinct and many aspects of it operate at an unconscious level, being also the product of neuropsychological processes. For the first-time prisoner, as we have seen, bodily reactions, such as an increase in heart rate, blood pressure and sleeping problems, provoked by the new environment and producing, what we commonly call, anxiety, heavily mark the first days and weeks of prison exposure. This provokes an instinctual survival response. One of these common responses is withdrawal from attachments (Jones and Schmid 2000). Family contacts are affected since some prisoners prefer not to meet relatives in order to avoid the recurrent pain of losing them again. In some cases, as Jones and Schmid have highlighted, the prisoner may decide to terminate relationships or start divorce proceedings, so that they may take control of something that they see as inevitable. Such actions show that prisoners still try to control at least some aspects of their lives.

Religion is also one of those strategies (see also Greer 2000). The latest statistics about religion in prison (Guessous et al. 2000) in England and Wales have shown that 62 per cent of prisoners profess a faith. Religion, indeed, provides prisoners with some psychological, cognitive and social capital with which to face the difficulties of everyday life behind bars. From a social viewpoint, most of the religions require congregations and have celebrations that prisoners can attend. During these events, friendships are formed between prisoners residing in different wings. Additionally, religion provides the prisoners with a potential sense of communality that overcomes the traditional divisions existing within all prisons, such as ethnicity. From a cognitive perspective, religion influences the way in which prisoners use memory and cognitive models, so that they can make sense of their lives, both before and after incarceration. Rituals, such as prayer, help to control emotions and the flux of time, and assembling together, as in the case of a religious congregation, aids the formation of a sense of unity and membership. Religion helps prisoners to accept their existential realities through two main factors: the transferral of control over their lives from the prison system to an abstract idea, such as God, and the acceptance of their imprisonment as God's will. Finally, religion provides hope for future change or a promise of change.

Yet, although the effects of religion, as part of a survival strategy, have many positive effects on prisoners' quality of life, religion may also provoke negative feelings. Some examples of the negative effects include guilt, an

increase in pre-existing compulsory behaviour, an increase in fear, emotional instability, a possible increase in pre-existing paranoiac tendencies, sectarianism and essentialised views of the world. Although it depends in part upon the religious tenets and their interpretations, religion can also, for instance, reinforce feelings of guilt about sexual behaviour that exists within any prison, such as masturbation and same sex practices (Hensley 2002). Prayers, rosaries and other rituals can become part of existing compulsory behaviours affecting some prisoners, and in some circumstances, the problem may become so serious that it affects the social life of the individual. Although, as said above, religion may provide a protection against depression, for some prisoners it can instead accentuate such feelings. For instance, a Roman Catholic who committed murder may be reminded that homicide is a capital sin, or a Muslim prisoner may be reminded by an imam about the afterlife punishment known as the 'torment of the grave'⁴ and thereafter live in continuous fear of it. Therefore, it is important in a study of prisoners who define themselves as Muslim to observe both sides of the coin. Indeed, the religious experience is, ultimately, a personal and cognitive–emotional one.

The Experience of Being a Muslim Prisoner

As discussed above, Muslim prisoners, as human beings, share much of the physical and emotional experience of prison with other prisoners. Hence, we need to ask what their 'feeling to be' Muslim and being identified as Muslim may add to the shared experience of being a prisoner. As I have mentioned in the Introduction, research on the different aspects of being Muslim in prison is very recent, not only in Europe but also in the United States and Australia (Ammar et al. 2004). When research has been conducted, it falls mainly within the field of criminology and less commonly, sociology, ethnic studies and religious studies (Joly 2007; Beckford et al. 2005; Beckford and Gilliat 1998). Anthropologists have shown little interest in prisons (Rhodes 2001) and even less in Muslim inmates. Consequently, the majority of studies, as we have seen, have focused on the practice of Muslims in prison, the issues they face, challenges in providing services for them (such as chaplaincy) and the discrimination they suffer (Beckford et al. 2005). Usually, this has meant little beyond lengthy discussions about the provision of halal food or facilities for Friday prayers (Beckford et al. 2005).

Thus, in this chapter, I wish to provide a different perspective. I will discuss the experience of Muslim prisoners, starting from my own extended

fieldwork, and focus on their relationship with Islam, officers, other prisoners and their families from a less 'technical' viewpoint and instead look into more personal and emotional dimensions. In doing so, I hope to provide some inside insight to what the social-political-emotional identity category 'Muslim' means in such a closed environment.

There are some similarities among Muslim prisoners that, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age or affiliation to schools of Islamic thought, can be emphasised before looking at the specific cases. Beckford et al. (2005: 190, italics in the text) have observed,

In short, the picture that most of our informants painted of their life before entering prison did not give pride of place to the practice of Islam, to Islamic knowledge or to active involvement in Muslim community affairs. Their choice of friends also suggested that their life had not been lived exclusively in Muslim circles. On the contrary – and with some exceptions – they gave the impression that it was in prison that practice of Islam had assumed greater importance for them and that their relations with fellow-Muslims had been strengthened. Their performance of individual and congregational prayers, their reading of the Qur'an and of other Islamic texts and their attempts to avoid pollution from unclean or illicit [*haram*] food or conduct had all increased in prison, thereby sharpening their sense of identity as Muslims.

My research, which involved a higher number of prisons and prisoners for a lengthier period of time than this particular study, has confirmed the trend described above. The majority of Muslim prisoners did not practice Islam, or limited its practice to major festivities and the avoidance of pork before being committed to prison. Women, in my study, tended to practise Islam even less than men before incarceration, and the great majority of both described their new relationship with Islam as either a 'reconversion or a 'rediscovery'. Unsurprisingly, they saw prison as Allah's will and an opportunity for change, or even a kind of rescue from a possible greater danger. A 26-year-old lifer of Pakistani origin, sentenced for homicide to 15 years before being eligible for parole, noticed, 'Allah sent me to prison, but I could have been the dead one. It was a fifty-fifty chance. The other guy, in life, was no better than me. Yet I still have a chance to change; he doesn't.'

Nonetheless, a considerable number, though acknowledging the divine intervention in their destiny as prisoners, still perceived the length of their sentence or the juridical system (i.e. the secular courts) that brought them

to prison as being unjust (See Chapters 5 and 6 in this book). Women with children did not see their sentence as being part of 'Divine Will' since according to the great majority, Allah would not keep a mother distant from her child. A surprising number of Asian respondents compared, metaphorically, their detention to the so-called *torment of the grave*,

We are like dead. You know, our families can think of us, but it is like when you think about a dead relative. You can come to visit us, but it is like when you go visit a grave; it is a sad act, something that leaves you with a bitter taste. We are in a grave: look around! We are here to suffer and to feel our wrongdoing on our skin, our soul. But after this, after having paid, we will be free again. (Sharif, 24 years old, of Pakistani origin, Prison Cat A)

As we will discuss further in this book, the 'death theme' was a recurrent one among my respondents, especially when young.

Rituals of Survival and Hope: Ramadan, Prayers and Hajj

Some aspects of Islam appear to have not only religious but also emotional value for all Muslim prisoners: Ramadan, the prayers, the Hajj and the festivities of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. While the two festivities are an occasion, today in nearly all UK prisons, for meeting with other Muslim prisoners and to have, as one prisoner put it, a 'home atmosphere', Ramadan and the Hajj are theologically, and indeed emotionally, linked to repentance and forgiveness. Also, prayers have several emotional meanings. Some prisoners see prayer as a way of assessing their personal progress, 'I try to pray five times per day, every day. I can see that I am improving and changing.' For others, praying is part of 'controlling' time: 'When I pray, I control time. It is my time, and nobody can stop me. Prayers help me to feel alive.' Prayers are also a way to decrease tension, 'I concentrate during the prayer and this shit disappears', or let out emotions that otherwise can be interpreted as weakness, 'I pray and then I do du'a, as all Muslims do, and I cry. It is the only time I can really cry.' Prayers also can lessen the pain of distance between prisoners and their families, 'I pray and make du'a for my family. I have done wrong, I cannot change it. But I can do something for them from here – I can pray for my parents!' The observance of five prayers, or at least as many the prisoner can succeed in respecting, provides a symbolic element to mark the, usually rediscovered, essence of 'feeling to be Muslim'

(Marranci 2006). Yet prayers can become also a political tool or part of an ideological, more or less invisible, struggle with the establishment, 'I pray for the mujahidin, I make du'a for them. Nobody knows, and nobody can know. The officers are there and I pray for what they despise. This government can make all the legislation they want against Muslims, but how can they stop me from thinking or making du'a?'

If Ramadan and the act of praying helps to survive and adapt to, or even challenge, the prison environment, the Hajj acquires a different meaning. Of all the main five pillars of Islam, the only one that cannot be performed during the detention is, for obvious reasons, the Islamic pilgrimage. This, however, does not mean that the Hajj cannot have a remarkable emotional significance for the prisoners. Exactly because the prisoner ought to complete not only his detainment but also the parole, my respondents, of both genders and all age groups, have presented the Hajj as the final part of their spiritual journey in prison. 'When I leave prison I will go to Hajj' was a remarkably common statement. It is not surprising either that, in the case of recidivists, I have met people who had performed the Hajj before and now are ready for another. Indeed, the prisoners would remind me that the Hajj cleanses a person from sin, and since the social debt has been paid back through incarceration, a person must go and ask forgiveness from God to achieve a new spiritual start in life. For lifers, the Hajj had an even more significant meaning, as some of them will be old when they leave prison. In the case of women, life in prison means losing the possibility to have children or to watch their existing children grow. A Black African-Caribbean woman, aged 25 and serving a sentence of at least 20 years, noticed, 'Inshallah, I will leave this prison alive. Yet if I do so, I will be probably a grandmother. I have only Islam left now to support me. When out, I want to go on Hajj and ask for forgiveness. I will have not much else left.' The Hajj is not only discussed but, as some prisoners described, 'imagined', 'expected', and 'wished for'. It signifies freedom and new beginnings and this creates powerful emotions.

The two festivities of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, linked to Ramadan and the Hajj, respectively, are very much anticipated by Muslim prisoners because in many prisons visitors will be allowed (depending upon the security level of the prison) to bring in special food and longer association hours will be provided. My respondents, again across the sample, linked the two events to memories of home and family. Contact with Muslims outside prison, even when not linked to one's own family or network of friends, are very important and appreciated. Yet, as we shall discuss in Chapter 7, those Muslim prisoners who sincerely use religion to achieve a deep change in

their lives tend to idealise the idea of the Muslim ummah and what they can expect from it in terms of support and acceptance. This appears to set the stage for bitter disappointments in future, since my research has suggested that few Muslims are ready to accept former Muslim prisoners and few mosques or Islamic institutions are prepared to provide support. Former Muslim prisoners are often considered at best bad Muslims, and at worst 'plastic', or false. The only exception that I have found to this rule is for individuals who converted to Islam in prison, since many will see the conversion as a clean break with the person's past.

Relationship between Fellow Muslim Prisoners

My study partially confirms what Beckford et al. (2005, see also Beckford and Gilliat 1998) have described about the relationships among Muslim prisoners,

In short, Muslim prisoners, as category are far from being homogeneous or uncritical of one another. Divisions among them follow the contours of nationality, language, skin colour, age and morality. In turn, these differences reinforce some prisoners' sense of what 'real' or 'true' Muslims are like. In spite of the fault lines and tensions that fracture the category of 'Muslims', however, our research uncovered extensive evidence of mutual support and co-operation among the majority of Muslim inmates. In fact the combination of self-identification processes and the prominence officially given to ethnicity and religion in prison helped to forge distinctive patterns of sociability and solidarity among many – but not all – Muslim inmates. (Beckford et al. 2005: 197)

After the intensification of the 'war on terror' following various attacks and failed plots, the lives of Muslims within the British prison system became more difficult, partly because of the mass media's focus upon the issue of 'radicalisation' within it. This pressure and scrutiny have extraordinarily reinforced mutual support among Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds, 'We are Muslims. We need today, more than ever, to stick together, curry-eater and non curry-eater', emphasised Muhammad, a 22-year-old British African-Caribbean. As we will discuss in the subsequent chapters, and in particular, Chapters 5 and 6, the antiextremist measures introduced by the Prison Services in England and Wales have had an impact on how this new unity has formed.

Despite this reinforced sense of 'prison ummah', the idea of what it means to be a good Muslim remains based upon ethnic and national traditions. Finally, although during my research I have found that a minority used the prefix 'British' as part of their self-described identity (e.g. British Muslim, British Pakistani Muslim, and so forth) as also Beckford et al. have observed (2005: 195), I noticed that this was more common among young offenders and women. Yet in the majority of cases, this was not a symptom of religious zeal, but rather of the racism, discrimination and rejection that they have experienced before incarceration, and particularly afterwards, as Ishmael, a 29-year-old of Pakistani descent, explained:

I have ambivalent feelings toward the British Pakistani or British Muslim thing. I mean in the case of religion, it does not make sense to add a nationality to it. You are Muslim, and that's it. Now Pakistan is a nation, right? I do not have double nationality: I am British and my parents are Pakistani. I don't understand what it means to be British Pakistani. Do we have British Scots, or British Welsh? Or, how about British Italians? So, I felt that Muslim made more sense to me. After being here [prison], I have understood that they [prison staff] will never see us as British, but only as Paki and Muslim. So why to use the 'British' bit? Only goras can be British – apna (our people) can only be Pakis and Muslims. You see, it's not my choice, but as everything else here, it's theirs.

Muslim Women and Prison

In November 2008, the Prison Service of England and Wales detained 4,365 women, representing 5 per cent of the overall prison population. The majority were committed to custody for non-violent offences. Of all women, prisoners of foreign nationality accounted for 19 per cent and about 3 per cent of all female prisoners were Muslim. In general, female prisoners tend to serve short sentences, and in 2007, about two-thirds of all women imprisoned had received a custodial sentence of 6 months or less. There are very few women's prisons in the United Kingdom: 14 are in England, none in Wales and 2 in Scotland. This means that 60 per cent of female prisoners are held in prisons outside their home region.

The general research in the fields of criminology, sociology and psychology, on prison and gender that focuses particularly on women, has certainly grown in the last 10 years (Lindquist and Lindquist 1997).⁵ Yet none have specifically focused on Muslim women and very few have mentioned

their case. It is obvious that female Muslim prisoners face the same problems as any other female prisoner, and among these, for many, is the traumatic experience of being a distant mother. A recent report on the health of female prisoners has painted an alarming picture, 'women in custody are five times more likely to have a mental health concern than women in the general population, with 78 per cent exhibiting some level of psychological disturbance when measured on reception to prison, compared with a figure of 15 per cent for the general adult female population.'⁶ The report has also emphasised that female prisoners have a general health condition much worse, proportionally speaking, than the adult female population outside prison. Many of these women have suffered, at some point during the early stages of their lives, physical or sexual (often both) abuse. The majority (66 per cent) of female prisoners are mothers or have dependent children under the age of 18; more than 40 per cent of these have children aged between 5 and 10, and a further 34 per cent are mothers to children less than 5 years of age (Prison Reform Trust 2000).

Much of the above profile matches my female Muslim respondents, who in the majority were African-Caribbean immigrants; so that, in addition to the above problems, a poor command of English has often increased their everyday stress and prevented many from having access to the Islamic literature that they were seeking. Many of these women have converted to Islam while in prison through contact with British African-Caribbean inmates. Indeed, within the women's prisons I have visited, ethnic lines were clearly marked and there were some tensions between the Black Africans, the few Asians and the Black African-Caribbean inmates. Yet inside such ethnic divisions, the support among the female Muslim prisoners was extremely strong. Of all the reasons for 'rediscovering' or 'reverting' to Islam, one had a particular recurrence: the desire to become a good mother and an example for one's children. During my visits, I have noticed a higher level of depression and self-harm among the Muslim female prisoners, and particularly those with longer sentences, than amongst the men (Dear et al. 1998). In one prison, I had the opportunity to spend considerable time with four prisoners in their own cells. It was here that they felt the most comfortable, while showing pictures and discussing their lives, including some of the most difficult aspects of their life both before and after imprisonment.⁷

One of the Black Caribbean prisoners told me that she self-harmed in places that are difficult to detect, since she needed the pain to feel alive. Yet at the same time she said she was aware, as the female imam had reminded her, that Islam does not allow self-harming or suicide. She felt that being a good Muslim in prison was very difficult if you had to spend so much time

behind bars (in this case 8 years). Among the things that she, and the majority of my female respondents, reported was the difficulty of maintaining dignity, 'I mean, here there are male officers and they check on you during night, and well you are not covered all the time because it is hot . . . so they can see you, and in certain situations . . . like, the shower is even worse. In Islam, it is not supposed to happen' (Amida, 24 years old, Somali). Yet some of the female prisoners I interviewed, particularly those of a Black-Caribbean background, had critical views of those of their fellow inmates who showed what they defined as 'the perfect Muslim' attitude. One British African-Caribbean, Raika, aged 28, frankly observed,

I want to tell you the truth. Here we are Muslims because it is our identity and we try to improve. Nobody is an angel though. Some want to show that they are the best Muslims. They complain that the officer may have seen them in underwear or whatever by chance. You know the kind of, 'they touched me here or there' while searching. In reality, here there are lots of things going on among us, the Muslims. Violence, drugs and the rest, as in any prison I suppose. We, including me, do things that we shouldn't as Muslims, but we are women like any others, you know what I mean? A Muslim woman is not a nun, okay? You are here and you need human contact, affection and this means also sex. So, you cannot avoid it. So, there are no good Muslims here, only Muslims who try to be good.

Although we will discuss the issue of sexuality and the consequent emotional contradiction later, it is relevant to see how Islam, as religion, became a means of 'competition' among certain women, or a form of 'shield' against difficult realities linked to contradictions between their pre- and post-incarceration lives.

My female respondents, in contrast to the majority of male Muslim prisoners whom I met, emphasised this impossibility of being a good Muslim while in prison, and in addition, few mentioned the desire to perform the Hajj once released. The ritualistic aspects of Islam, including Ramadan, had a less emotional value when compared with the situation I have found in men's prisons. Of course, in Islam, women do not need to fast during menstruation and also prayers, including Friday prayers, are, from some theological perspectives, less obligatory than for men. Notwithstanding, Islam was clearly used to form in-group communities of support and alliance that help to protect against the prison environment and also minimise the gossip from outside the group, as one prisoner pointed out:

I have a partner here, and she is Muslim like me. I would not trust a non-Muslim, but with Muslims it is different. It goes beyond rituals, you understand? We are a family. I do not expect backstabbing from Muslims, while Christian Caribbeans are all about exchange. We protect each other, even when we do not like each other, you understand?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, international politics, such as the Iraq war, issues in the Middle East and events in the United Kingdom had less of an impact upon Muslim women in prison than their male counterparts, and the political discourse in general was low. Islam, in this instance, became a way to share emotions within a smaller group than the wider ethnic or national one.

Muslims in Young Offenders' Institutions

In September 2008, there were 12,298 young people in custody, aged between 12 and 20 years, and more than 13 per cent of whom were Muslims. The majority of young people were in prison for the offence of 'violence against the person'. Most of the Muslim young offenders whom I met had been in prison at least once before my interview. Indeed, in general, the reconviction rate among young people is very high. In 2004, according to the Home Office Statistical Bulletin,⁸ nearly 75 per cent of young men released from prison were reconvicted within 2 years. Among the young Muslim offenders there is a certain balance between Asians (about 42 per cent) and Blacks (34 per cent) that is not representative of adult institutions. In the establishments that I have visited, the division along ethnic lines tended to be well marked.

As discussed in the previous chapter, young Muslims often live in deprived areas that are affected by high levels of unemployment and illiteracy. Parallel to the general majority of young offenders, Muslim inmates often suffer from poor literacy and numeracy skills, and a high percentage have either left or been excluded from school, before incarceration. I have found that a high rate of Muslim young offenders report some form of mental health problems, which are often linked to the abuse of drugs and alcohol. This is in harmony with studies (Singleton et al. 2000) that demonstrate young offenders to be more likely than adults to suffer from mental illnesses, some of which can be as serious as schizophrenia or other paranoid states. While during my research in adult establishments I have found that Muslims tended to have a low rate of self-harm and very few reportings

of suicidal thoughts; in young offenders' institutions Muslims appeared to be vulnerable to both, with a stronger emphasis on self-harm that often was hidden or presented to the authorities as an 'accident'. Indeed, the young Muslims who self-harmed were not doing so in order to attract attention, but rather to release high levels of stress or even to punish themselves for acts that they deemed to be 'sinful'. As we shall discuss below shortly, some of these punitive acts of self-harm are linked to the stress of engaging in sexual practices that are discouraged or condemned in Islam (such as masturbation and erotic relationships with fellow inmates). Young Muslim prisoners, in the institutions I have visited, reported that they felt insecure within their prisons and that assault, primarily by fellow prisoners and also by staff, was very common and increasingly based on religious discrimination (see also Solomon 2003). As one of my respondents commented, Islam is more than a religion in prison: it becomes an identity marker that affects everyday life behind bars,

I am fifteen, and I'm here for gun possession. I shouldn't be here; I should be at home with my mother. My father was a Muslim, but my mother is not, she's Christian. I am a Black Caribbean Muslim. I am now. I mean, religion did not mean very much to me before. Now, I cry on the Qur'an. I look strong in the wing. I have to, or become a victim, you know? Islam for me is more than a religion, here. It marks you; it becomes part of you. The officers will treat you in a different way, so too the others, and you are then part of a community and you can share, I mean . . . be softer and not so strong. (Muhammad, 15 years old, British Black Caribbean)

For young Muslim prisoners, Islam is a way to connect with each other, especially when from the same ethnic background, and also cope with the suffering of being detached from one's family.

Because of the location of the young offenders' institutions, children are often held at an average of 50 miles away from their home or committal court, with some even being at a distance of 100 miles away from their homes.⁹ In one of the institutions I visited, the distance and difficulties in reaching the establishment¹⁰ highly affected the Muslim population since the majority came from cities of an average of 80 to 100 miles away. In these cases, the young prisoner received very few visits from their relatives,

My parents cannot really come often. It's distant and you need money to pay for a taxi. Mum, also, suffers a lot when she comes here. I mean, it is shit. You know, she dresses traditional, and everybody from the screws to

the kafirs here in this shithole look at her and they make fun of me after. So they do not come often: it is shit to come here. (Shafi, 14 years old, Pakistani origin)

It is not surprising that the great majority of my respondents from South Asian backgrounds saw their mothers rarely, if at all, during their detention. The main female figures visiting them were their sisters and, if they had, girlfriends. The lack of family support has a strong impact on these young Muslims, including aspects that, though not directly related, are linked to forms of radicalisation. Indeed, as we shall discuss in later chapters, some of the young Muslim prisoners, affected by both depression and a lack of contact with family members, not only supported what they called 'resistance' in Iraq and Afghanistan, but declared that they would join it,

I pray everyday for the mujahidin in Iraq and Afghanistan. I have been here [prison] three times and it is shit, but my life is shit and I will be here again and again. I am Muslim so, I mean, I cannot do what some do here [i.e. suicide] – you have to use life in a better way. My family has left me. You know, I've seen them three times in years, but I don't blame them. I have shamed them. I hope to become a shahid. (Musa, 16 years old, Pakistani origin)

Much of the distress that Musa suffered came from a recent move from his previous cell and the resulting separation from his cellmate¹¹ and also the awareness that his family had given up on him. Musa was, according to the prison imam as well as the officers, not particularly religious. Yet it was clear that his lack of family support and his suicidal thoughts were both channelled through his fantasies of a 'glorious' exit from a 'shit life'.

Although young Muslim offenders often used Islam as an act and marker of identity (see Marranci 2006 and 2008a), as well as a means of creating fantasies in which they could escape the drama of their lives or change their own destiny, sometimes it was precisely their Muslim identity that indirectly caused depression or even self-harm. In the case of young Muslim offenders, similar to the adult male and female prisoners, the strongest sense of guilt came from what was perceived as improper sexual behaviours (Hensley 2002). Among these behaviours, respondents emphasised masturbation, mutual masturbation and homosexual acts. As much of the psychological literature reports, some homosexual behaviours are often part of teenagers' exploration with sex, and certainly masturbation is extremely common

among teenagers of both sexes. Yet in the case of prisons, the near total lack of privacy facilitates abnormal situations as well as feelings of guilt. To my surprise, this issue was clearly described to me by five different respondents in two different establishments. One 17-year-old of Bangladeshi origin told me, in a very emotional interview,

I feel bad. I am Muslim, but I do things that shame me. I mean you are a man and you may understand. Have you seen my cell? In there, you share everything with your pal, how could you not? So you hear and, well, sometimes you see and do things that Muslims are not supposed to. I was not like that before: prison made me like that. When I do things, I then punish myself by giving myself pain or even provoking officers so that they beat me up.¹²

In many cases, the conditions that young Muslim offenders endure are much harsher than in adult prisons.¹³ This is partly because of the depression that they often experience and because of the higher level of violence that exists in these establishments for young offenders. These children are deprived of the affection and attention that they desperately need. Unsurprisingly, although ideological and political discourse is very low among them, their approach to Islam is very emotional and often more aggressive than in adult prisons.

The Habit Does Not Make the Monk, but the Beard Makes the Terrorist

In recent years, at least after Richard Reid, better known as the Shoe Bomber, failed to blow up his foot, and with it the transatlantic aeroplane upon which he was travelling, the mass media have reported alarmist news of radicalisation within prison. Titles such as 'Prisons failing to tackle terror recruitment'¹⁴ have forced the English and Welsh Prison Service, which is very sensitive to press criticism, to increase the surveillance of the Muslim prison population in general. Recently, a special Prison Service unit, *The Extremist Policy Unit*, has been set up to provide a policy on Islamic radicalisation in prison and to collect intelligence. Articles, like that mentioned above, have no qualms to suggest that Al-Qaeda is controlling the radicalisation within prisons as part of its own terrorist strategies. As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 6, the reality of radicalisation among current and former

prisoners, both inside and outside prison, is in reality more complex and fluid, and much of the press reports tend to be based on stereotypes or misleading interpretations of reality.

As we have observed in these chapters, life for prisoners is not easy, and for Muslim prisoners it can be especially daunting because of the racial and religious discrimination they face and also the psychological and emotional challenges linked to their 'feeling of being Muslim'. Yet after 9/11, and especially 7/7, the fear of widespread radicalisation within prisons has made life in prison, particularly for men and young male offenders, even more difficult. In this section, I wish to provide some examples and first hand accounts of what I call 'stereotyped politically driven victimisation'. Prison staff and fellow non-Muslim prisoners often perpetrate, to varying degrees, this type of victimisation. I shall start from the institutionalised version, presenting some of the comments that I have collected from prison officers during informal conversations:

I try to stop them [Muslims] from engaging and speaking to other prisoners. This is something that many of us do here. Muslims have only one plan: converting prisoners and making them fanatics like them. Of all prisoners, Muslims are the most insidious; they seem to give you less problems, but it's all fake. They win your trust to spread their ideology of death. I think that we need prisons for Muslims only, where we are able to take good care of them. Here [in this prison] we have among the most dangerous and they hate us, our society and freedom. (Male Officer, Cat A prison)

In this excerpt of the conversation we notice some relevant elements upon which 'stereotyped politically driven victimisation' is based. First of all, a considerable number of officers believe that Muslims approach other prisoners with the intention of converting them to Islam. Conversion to Islam is perceived as a negative thing, as this anecdote I collected in a Scottish prison can show:

One day I had to check if the religion of one prisoner was right on our records. I interviewed the prisoner and he told me that now he was Muslim. I told him that to become Muslim was a serious thing and it needed a little surgery [he made the gesture of cutting something while alluding to circumcision]. I told him that he needed to speak to an imam and arrange the thing. Well, when I met the prisoner again, he said that he was not a Muslim and did not need to speak to an imam. He admitted that he said he was Muslim only because he thought that Muslims were offered better food.

Although I tend to think that this anecdote is just a joke that then became popular, it is important to highlight how the supposed actions of the prison officer would breach the SPS Race Relations Policy, and possibly the human rights of the prisoner involved. Yet the officers who reported the anecdote seemed unable to recognise the implications it carried.

The attempts to discourage the conversion to Islam were even stronger in England and Wales, as one prisoner in Cat B has reported,

I was sincerely interested in Islam and asked, as is my right, to attend the jummah [Friday] prayer. The first few times I was not unlocked and they said that they [the officers] had to speak first to the Imam. This went on for a couple of weeks until I was able to speak to a Muslim about my intentions. He spoke to the Imam and then I was allowed to attend the prayer. But my life became miserable: my cell was searched more often and even sometimes with dogs. I became immediately a target, something I was not before. When I started to grow a beard, one officer approached me and said, 'if I were you, I'd cut that thing. You look like a terrorist, you know'. I was stressed enough and decided to again attend the Catholic mass. The pressure magically stopped. (John, 28 years old, English origin)

Symbols, like the beard and the cap, were often associated quite openly to terrorism by some officers and prisoners. A few officers, particularly in Cat A prisons that hold a number of Muslim prisoners remanded or sentenced for terrorism-related offences, appeared to perceive themselves as part of a 'war' against terrorism. They see these prisoners as special, and by association, all Muslims as potentially dangerous, monolithic in their views and having 'secret' plans to control the prison, if not the entire world. Of course these attitudes are not conducive to the rehabilitation of Muslim prisoners or to a healthy prison environment.¹⁵

During my research, some of the male Muslim prisoners, who were moved from other Cat A prisons, complained of degrading practices such as full-body and cavity searches¹⁶ performed in front of female officers;¹⁷ dogs were misused during cell (or prisoner) searches and intimidation, particularly by using dogs,¹⁸ of family members, often of Asian origin, coming to visit the prisoners. This intimidation often resulted in the visits being stopped at the prisoner's request in order to avoid putting such stress on relatives. The accounts are several, and in some prisons it seems that there are serious breaches of human rights which are under investigated, but the effect is the same: a strong emotional reaction, expressed through Islam, against not only the prison but also both the state and society in general.

The feeling, real or perceived, of continuous surveillance and increased security surrounding Muslim prisoners has induced forms of paranoia among some of them who had mental health problems even before entering prison. There is a widespread idea among Muslim prisoners, including the majority who were sentenced for non-terrorist related crimes, that what matters most in prison is their being Muslim. Religion, as we also discuss later in this book, acquires in this case an emotional-identity factor that, however, is actually facilitating extremism where years ago it was not an issue. The growing institutionalised belief within prisons that ‘the beard makes the terrorist’ and the connected consequences have also had an effect upon non-Muslim inmates, increasing discrimination and violence against Muslims¹⁹ and consequently fear among them. As we shall see, fear has a fundamental role in how Islam is understood in prison and sometimes transformed into a powerful ideology.

Not Only Sunni: The Invisible Shi‘a

We have seen in this chapter how the research on Muslim prisoners is only at its beginning and still very much understudied (Spalek 2002, Beckford et al. 2005). Yet there is one aspect of Muslim prisoners that has been completely ignored: Shi‘a prisoners. No prison study in the United Kingdom has mentioned them, and even the official prison statistics have not mentioned them and instead submerged them within the general terminology of ‘Muslims’ (see for instance Guessous et al. 2000). The main reason for this lack of information may be found in the small population of Shi‘a Muslims in prison.²⁰ During my research, I was informed that the Shi‘a Muslims detained in prison were less than 1 per cent of the total Muslim population in prison. In 1999, the Islamic Cultural Centre and IQRA Trust, cooperating with the Al-Khoei Foundation (Al-Khoei 2001: 3), started the National Council for the Welfare of Muslim Prisoners. The Al-Khoei Foundation has campaigned during these years, and not without difficulties, for the support of Shi‘a Muslims who face even more challenges than Sunni prisoners. Although I will address the specific case of Shi‘a Muslims in prison in a future publication, it is important to mention that many Shi‘a prisoners keep a low profile, or even do not report their being part of the Shi‘a branch of Islam, for fear of bullying from the Sunni majority, as one Shi‘a prisoner clearly stated:

I am a Shi‘a Muslim, but I have to be very quiet about it and behave like a Sunni. It’s dangerous to be a Shi‘a in prison. Some Sunni hate you to death. There was a Shi‘a brother here and they had to move him because

his life was hell, and also gossip went around that he helped other Muslims to be Shi'a. They wanted to kill him. We do not have freedom of religion as Shi'a. Sometimes somebody comes to visit us, a Shi'a imam. But look, we are more here, but many still go into hiding, you know, Shi'a can do that if they fear for their lives.

My research has shown that, at this stage, the status of Shi'a Muslims in prison is underestimated and their human rights are often breached. Yet since many of the attacks, abuses, and bullying that they suffer is at the hands of other Muslims, there are few complaints that reach the Prison Service. Furthermore, in some prisons, officers may understand this harassment as an internal issue to the Muslim community, and they thus expect the Sunni imam to deal with it. The events in Iraq, the increase of radical forms of Islam and intolerance within some prisons make the Shi'a Muslims' experience of prison highly stressful.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have started to observe the life of Muslim prisoners. Again, we have to emphasise that Muslim prisoners are no different to any other prisoners and are equally affected by the prison environment and the emotional impact that it has on people. For this reason, we have discussed the process of adaptation to prison and the difficulties involved. Prison is a restricted environment in which people cannot fully control their lives and have limited choices in everyday life. Indeed, as such, prison is an anomaly in the human condition. This reality affects not only the social dimension but also the emotional and, consequently, how the autobiographical-self perceives the prison environment and makes it a part of its memory. Of course, as we shall discuss in the following chapters, these physical, cognitive and psychological elements have an impact upon how Muslim prisoners 'feel to be' Muslim, and hence make sense of Islam as a religion.

Notwithstanding the similarities existing in the shared experience of prison that are linked to the universal elements of being human, to be recognised or to define oneself as a Muslim has consequences upon how a person interacts, engages and is treated within prisons. In this chapter, we have observed how the rituals of Islam and their practice often acquire an extra layer of meanings, though with some differences in the case of women, which help the prisoner in his everyday interaction with the prison environment as well as psychological changes. Many variables affect the

relationship between prisoners, and ethnicity is surely one of the most powerful among them. Yet we have noticed that Islam has been used by prisoners to cross such ethnic boundaries. Prisoners have also, consciously or unconsciously depending upon the cases, capitalised on Islam, as religion, to reform links with family or to reduce the impact that the lack of family contact has on their lives.

The case of Muslim women in prison needs more attention, as does the often disheartening condition of Muslim young offenders. I have tried to provide in this chapter a glimpse of the specific difficulties that they face and the role that Islam plays in their captive lives. The female Muslim prisoners seemed more affected by the experience of detention and the lack of family contact than the adult males. Furthermore, many of these women are mothers, and this fact adds a greater burden to their imprisonment. Through rediscovering or converting to Islam, some of the female prisoners wished to express their intention of becoming 'good mothers' or 'good examples' for their children. Islam has appeared to strongly help these women, as also the young offenders, to socialise and to survive the process of adaptation to prison.

However, as I have mentioned above, religion in prison has no exclusive positive effects upon the prisoners. As any other religion, Islam is a way of life intended for people living in freedom. Furthermore, Islam, similar to other religions, reinforces the idea of fair punishment for wrongdoing, though also at the same time reminding the wrongdoers of the mercy of God. Yet in an environment such as prison, focusing on mercy is rather more difficult than dwelling on punishment. Another important aspect of prison life is sexuality, since prisoners have the same sexual needs as any other person. They have certainly not cheerfully chosen celibacy. Furthermore, many studies have shown how in case of depression or stress, sexual acts, such as masturbation, may be used to release emotive tension (Tewksbury and West 2000). In restrictive interpretations of Islam, as in all monotheistic religions, masturbation, homosexuality and homosexual acts are harshly condemned. In both young offenders' and adult institutions, among men and women, masturbation was clearly relatively frequent among Muslim inmates. The above elements, often together with the impossibility, for various psychological reasons, of reaching the level of religious piety desired by the prisoner, were the cause of strong psychological distress and occasional self-harm, as a form of self-punishment. Unlike self-harm intended to attract attention (see Dear et al. 1998), the injuries were often well hidden and unreported, increasing the myth that Muslims are at low risk for self-harm.

Muslim prisoners, particularly after 9/11 and 7/7, live under a higher level of official institutionalised surveillance. However, it is the distrust that many of them face from some prison officers and non-Muslim prisoners that make Muslim prisoners feel insecure within prison. My research has shown some serious problems of discrimination based mainly upon religious stereotypes and political victimisation, where all Muslims are seen as a threat to the country only because of their being Muslim. Adopting increasingly religious behaviour or converting to Islam can mean a rise in distrust and suspicion experienced from some sectors of the prison and especially from fellow inmates.

Finally, we have very briefly emphasised the lack of studies concerning the conditions in prison for Shi'a Muslims. My research has suggested that Shi'a Muslims are suffering not only from the same problems as all other prisoners with the added specific problems of being Muslims, but also from in-group discrimination and bullying because the Sunni majority of prisoners often display anti-Shi'a attitudes to varying degrees. In addition, international events, such as the war in Iraq, have made life for Shi'a prisoners very difficult and stressful, and moreover their support, provided by the Al-Khoei Foundation cannot be compared to that offered to the Sunni majority. After briefly trying to provide a glimpse of the experience of incarceration among Muslim prisoners and the main problems they face, in the next chapter we will focus on the role that various interpretations of Islam play in their lives.

Notes

- ¹ I suggest that to understand such processes, a good introduction to neuropsychology is offered by Kolb and Whishaw 2008.
- ² This study is based on the collaboration between the two authors, one of whom, at the time of the fieldwork, was an American inmate who had decided to start a sociology course at a university during his prison sentence and kept a detailed diary of his and other inmates' experiences as part of his project.
- ³ Muslims call each other brothers and sisters since they consider themselves part of a single ummah, i.e. community, which is seen as a family.
- ⁴ Muslims believe that after the burial has taken place, the deceased remains in a special sentient state in which, depending upon their sins, they can – among other punishments and rewards – perceive the grave as being extremely claustrophobic or very comfortable.
- ⁵ For a discussion of masculinity in prison, see for instance, Carrabine and Longhurst 1998; Newton 1994; Sim 1994; Hua-Fu 2005; Evans, T. 2008; Toch 1998. For a discussion about women prisoners, and especially mothers, you can see Loper

2006; Carlen 1983; Alemagno 2001; Banauch 1985; Dodge and Pogrebin 2001; Fogel and Martin 1992; Singer et al. 1995.

- ⁶ This study by Dr Emma Plugge on the Health of Women in Prison can be downloaded at www.publichealth.ox.ac.uk/units/prison
- ⁷ For reasons of space, I cannot discuss here in detail such aspects, and it is my intention to present the results of this part of the research in future publications.
- ⁸ Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Reoffending of adults: results from the 2004 cohort www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/hosb0607.pdf
- ⁹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, Annual Report 2005/2006, 30 January 2007, p. 39.
- ¹⁰ This young offenders' institution, previously a former military base, could only be reached by car or taxi, or with a scheduled bus that was organised by a charity devoted to helping families of prisoners.
- ¹¹ A study (Solomon, E. 2004) has shown that, while in custody, many young adults are frequently moved around the prison estate causing great disruption and distress.
- ¹² The HM Inspector of prisons (HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Youth Justice Board, *Juveniles in Custody, 2003–4*, London) has reported that one in ten boys and girls in prison say that they have been assaulted by a member of staff.
- ¹³ HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Youth Justice Board, *Juveniles in Custody, 2003–4*, London.
- ¹⁴ *The Guardian*, 2 October 2006, www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/oct/02/prison-andprobation.terrorism
- ¹⁵ In the annual report by the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons we can read that, in 2007, 40 per cent of Muslim prisoners, compared with 22 per cent of non-Muslims, said that they had been victimised by staff (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, Annual Report 2006/2007, 29 January 2008).
- ¹⁶ The prisoner is asked, or forced, to undress and then asked to turn around, open his or her mouth, show the soles of the feet, and then asked to stay in a squatting position so that the officers can check that no drugs or weapons are inserted in his, or her, anus.
- ¹⁷ This practice, which was often presented to me as a myth, was later confirmed when a Muslim prisoner officially made a complaint and the mass media reported it.
- ¹⁸ In some interpretations of Islam, dogs are seen as unclean or polluting and some Asians, especially women, have clearly shown distress when approached by the Prison Services' dogs.
- ¹⁹ Although there are no previous specific studies, even the mass media have recently reported an increase of fear among the Muslim prison population. On 20 August 2008, *The Independent* published a piece entitled, 'Muslim inmates living in fear at UK prison'.
- ²⁰ Indeed, even the census analysis has combined Sunni and Shi'a into the single category 'Muslim' because 'while more detailed classifications of ethnic and religious identity may have the advantage of providing greater information, measurement of ethnic and religious identity must take account of practical issues surrounding data collection and presentation' (Dobbs et al. 2006: 2).

Chapter 5

Rediscovering Islam in Prison: Between Wonder and Cognitive Opening

In the previous chapter we have discussed the difficulties that Muslims face within prison. As we have seen, some problems are similar to those of any other prisoners, some are specifically ethnic issues and others are linked to religious beliefs. Since the majority of Muslims entering prison, though having Muslim heritage, have often abandoned much of the practice of Islam – limiting their faith to family gatherings, rare attendance of jummah prayers, some fasting during Ramadan, and especially the avoidance of pork – we can say that they have rediscovered Islam *because* of their experience of prison. In other words, Islam becomes extremely important as part of the prisoners' identity (see also Spalek 2002; Spalek and El-Hassan 2007; Beckford et al. 2005). One of the main issues that I have found in the newly forming literature investigating the experience of Muslim prisoners is that it shows many of the same issues that the anthropological study of Islam had (Marranci 2008b). Scholars use keywords such as emotions, identity, religion and so forth without informing the reader from which perspective, or theory, they employ them. This can create confusion. For this reason I will clarify, in the sections below, my usage of terms such as emotion, feelings, identity, religion, beliefs and worldviews. Indeed, today, from the mass media to the government there is a strong belief that Muslims in prison are 'indoctrinated' with radical forms of Islam. My interviews with prison officers, especially the Race Equality Officers, demonstrated that they accepted the idea that Muslims, particularly of Asian and Black Caribbean origin, rediscover Islam because of their socialising with other Muslims. The 'reconversion' was, according to them, a matter of 'communication' and 'indoctrination'. In social scientific terms, we can say that the rediscovery of Islam by these prisoners was mainly understood as a 'cultural' phenomenon and as part of prison 'social interactions'. However, we may wish to ask whether this is really the only explanation of such widespread phenomenon

within prisons or whether there are some environmental aspects of incarceration which facilitate prisoners, whether from a Muslim family background or not, to rediscover Islam.

It is important here to remember the somewhat obvious but often overlooked fact that people are diverse. People think differently and make sense of reality differently, and similarly, the experience of rediscovering, or conversion to, Islam in prison is ultimately a unique and personal experience. Hence, Clear et al. (2000: 55) have rightly observed,

Each inmate experiences religion in prison in a highly personal way, and its meaning for him is precisely the same as his experience of it. In a prison of 1,000 inmates, there are 1,000 meanings. Any attempt to make sense of this personal aspect of meaning must follow the rules of classification and focus on similarities of experience to build something of a typology of religious experience. Adopting such a strategy, we must recognize that some of the richness of individual experiences will be lost in the process of grouping these experiences into larger, broader categories. Nevertheless, by taking this approach, we will be able to construct something of a typology of religious meanings in prison, at least insofar as these relate to individual experiences.

However, some aspects of being human are universal and linked to biological, especially neurocognitive, dimensions (Marranci 2006, 2008b). Too often social scientists, especially anthropologists and sociologists, have neglected (or even rejected) this fact and instead adopted radical constructivist approaches where culture, seen here as independent from nature, becomes the instigator of actions, thoughts and views. Emotions, as we shall discuss in this chapter, play a fundamental role in how people make sense of the environment (including prison) and both themselves and others, and form, through the processes that form the self, identities.

If we start from a cultural constructivist understanding of religion, such as the one offered, for example, by Geertz (1973), we have to accept that Muslim prisoners live only to fulfil their commitment to the faith of Islam (Spalek and El-Hassan 2007). I think that this essentialist view of culture, widely accepted but also increasingly challenged (Ingold 1996; Whitehouse 2001), is misleading. We need to go beyond the idea of culture as a 'real' autonomous entity, and rather regard it as 'the commodity of minds' and additionally consider 'that cultural knowledge does not form otherwise empty brains but is itself rested on non-cultural foundations of thought' (Tremelin 2006: 149). Among these foundations there are cognitive

operations (Sperber 1975, 1980), as well as the role that emotions and feelings play (Damasio 2004: 286). For this reason, it is more fruitful to discuss faith as a belief derived from specific cognitive and emotional processes than as the simple adoption of Islam, understood as a system of symbols and based upon specified sets of religious norms. In this chapter, we shall discuss first how emotions, faith and identity can be understood from the above tenets and how this has consequences on how we can see Muslim prisoners and their engagement with ‘an idea of Islam’. Only after clarifying these points can we concentrate on how my respondents have ‘rediscovered’ or ‘discovered’ Islam as a personal faith, as an act of identity or as a fusion of both.

Emotion, Identity and Faith

Emotions have been part of our everyday life since the day we were born. We experience them in various settings, and these contexts are central to how we react to them. The role that emotions play in religious practices and performances has been well documented within all fields of academic research since the eighteenth century (see Emmons and Paloutzian 2003: 384–90). Indeed, as Fuller has noticed,

There is no such thing as emotion-free religiosity; our brains and nervous systems are wired in such a way that we always bring vital needs and interests to our evaluation of, and response to, the surrounding environment. [...] it is not a question of *whether* emotions influence our religious thinking, but rather a matter of *which* emotions most strongly mobilize the subprograms that collectively constitute our perception and cognition.
(2007: 45, emphasis in the original)

The relevance of emotion in understanding religion and religious experiences is certainly not recent (Corrigan 2002), even by theologians writing between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1958). For instance, Schleiermacher, instead of viewing religion as part of knowledge, suggested that it was a ‘unique mode of feeling’ (see Fuller 2006: 3), while Otto argued that religion emerges from the encounter with the ‘holy’.

Religion plays an important role in the lives of many inmates. The vast majority of Muslims in prison have rediscovered Islam as part of their emotional process that the prison environment has shaped. To illustrate,

Yaqub, a 24-year-old Bangladeshi on remand in a Cat B prison, when recalling his first moments in prison, observed,

I hadn't prayed or fasted since I was eleven. I came here, I was locked in my pad, and they gave me a Qur'an and a prayer mat. I saw them and I felt the need to pray. It was like . . . I am here, I feel like I'm in a grave and the world is over. I was in fear, so I went back to prayers and reading the Qur'an.

Western scholars¹ have observed that emotions possess at least two meanings; one affecting the body, and the other belonging to the social and cultural domain. In the discussion of emotions, the polarisation between biological determinists and constructivists was apparently inevitable. The former would argue that emotions are mere bodily reactions to which, however, we provide a meaning according to the context. While the latter, on the other hand, would argue that, though they recognise that the biological contributes to the alchemy of cultural construction, emotions remain within the domain of ideas. In other words, we must decide whether Yaqub simply enacted a learned cultural response (i.e. praying when in danger) or if the emotions, such as fear and sadness, had the greater impact on his decision to start praying and practising Islam.

Charles Darwin, resulting from his work *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1859/1998), may be considered the father of the modern western scientific study of emotions. Darwin has stated that emotions in humans and animals have functional values, 'the principle of antithesis' for which emotions induce gestures and movements which are on the opposite of the others, so if to express aggression we expand our chests, when we feel helpless we tend to shrug our shoulders. Also, he suggested that the evolutionary origin of emotions is linked to the nervous system beyond intention and consciousness. For Darwin, emotions are still with us and unaffected by the process of natural selection since they are essential to our survival, both in natural and social contexts (cf. Plutchik 2003: 24–9). Today, students who root emotions within the biological, cognitive and psychoneurological domains have continued along Darwin's path (Plutchik 1997).

Therefore, evolutionary psychologists, such as Cosmides and Tooby (2000) have suggested that we can see emotions as 'superordinate programs' which regulate our behaviour so that we can adapt to the specific problems that the environment poses to humans. Some psychologists have argued that emotions 'constitute the primary motivational system for human beings' (Izard 1977: 3). The debate on emotions does not only

involve the question of their functions, but also the issues surrounding what exactly an emotion may be, in which way emotions can differ from moods or feelings, whether they are innate or learned and so forth. Ben-Ze'ev has observed that, since emotions are by their own nature subtle, 'the nature, causes, and consequences of the emotions are among the least understood aspects of human experience' (2000: xiii). Yet as we shall see, some recent developments in neuroscience have provided many meaningful answers (Damasio 2004, 2000) to the above questions.

Notwithstanding Darwin's influence on the study of emotions and the most recent neurocognitive scientific discoveries within the field of social sciences, explanations of emotions remain still anchored to the cultural perspective (Gay 2003). Scholars within the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, social psychology, cultural studies, and religious studies have privileged *constructivist* views that reject, partially or entirely (see for instance Harré 1986), biological explanations of emotions. Rather, they suggest that cultures construct them (see for instance, Geertz 1973; Heelas 2007; Lutz 2007).² Other studies³ have argued that emotions are a product of culture because they are primarily a social phenomenon and the product of social institutions. In this case, the social context induces and controls the mechanism of emotions. Although some scholars recognise that there are biological elements involved, 'emotions have a social ontology . . . a social-relational genesis' (Lyon, quoted in Milton 2007: 63). Since human beings are able to communicate and interact among themselves, emotions provide valuable feedback (Wentworth and Yardley 1994). Unsurprisingly, Parkinson has suggested, 'Emotion as an idea is socially and culturally manufactured, as also is emotion as a reality. [. . .] The idea is that emotion is private and internal; the reality is that it is intrinsically interpersonal and communicative or performative' (Parkinson 1995: 25). From this perspective, a Muslim prisoner, for instance, will mainly derive his emotions from social interactions with other fellow prisoners and, of course, symbols.

In contrast, instead of having a cultural and social ontology, we may suggest that the way in which we are biologically human is the deciding factor in how emotions are formed. Harré would 'censure' the idea that emotions are part of physiological processes as no more than an 'ontological illusion' (1986: 6). Rather, we must observe how words, such as 'anger', are used in specific cultural contexts. Harré is very passionate about his defence, but like other constructivists, he tends to reject engaging with recent neuroscientific discoveries. As a consequence, he is obliged to ideologically defend constructivist viewpoints arguing, though in various fashions, that culture, through symbols, controls and shapes our lives, whereas biological factors,

although undeniable, are only secondary factors in humans; a leftover from our 'Pleistocene' past. Constructivism sees humans as free from the dictatorship of instincts, since they can be controlled through culture, which is specific only to humans. In Geertz, this idea has been brought to its logical conclusions. Geertz has defined culture as a 'control mechanism – plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call “programs”) – for governing behavior' (1973: 44). In a previous version of the same article, he also emphasised that such a 'control mechanism' is achieved by 'the imposition of an arbitrary framework of symbolic meaning upon reality' (1964: 39). Without culture, people would be 'ungovernable, chaotic, shapeless and a-meaningful beings (Geertz 1964: 46). Non-humans (animals), though lacking in symbols and culture, avoid such chaos because they have natural 'control mechanisms' (i.e. instincts) that are substitutes for culture. In our case at hand, Muslims in prison are 'Muslim' because of a 'system of symbols' called Islam, and this will inspire their behaviour accordingly.

As Ingold has rightly observed, Geertz's argument, as that of many other constructivists, represents humans as 'suspended in webs of significance [and] puts humans in a kind of free-floating world in which we are ascribing significance to things “out there”' (Ingold 1996: 130). Pyysiäinen (2001) has also observed that Geertz refused to recognise the cognitive mechanism behind the formation of it. Geertz has presented humans as something different from the rest of nature, as beings resembling mythical fallen angels now trapped between the two dimensions of nature and nurture (Marranci 2006 and 2008b).

Today neuroscience tells us a very different story; our cerebral cortex has more to do with emotions, self, identity, and possibly even faith, than, as Harré would like, a juxtaposition of meaning within cultural contexts. Furthermore, it is important to remember the simple point that in order to feel our identities there is a need to have a conscious brain. Symbols, though relevant in the process of communicating otherwise incommunicable feelings, are neither what make us conscious nor what provide us with a sense of self and identity. This does not mean to reject the idea that emotions are generated during social interactions, but instead to dismiss the suggestion that they have a social or cultural 'ontology' (Milton and Svasek 2005: 35; Milton 2002). Rather, as Milton has argued, the 'other' producing the emotional behaviour 'does not have to be a social or human other; it can be anything with which the individual organism engages, for emotion is part of that engagement' (2005: 35). This leads to the conclusion that through engagement with different environments 'people learn

to love, hate, fear, or be disgusted by different things, so that their body reacts differently when things are encountered' (2005: 36). Emotions and feelings are central to the understanding of Islam in prison. I reject the constructivist argument: in my work (see in particular Marranci 2006, 2008b) I have suggested that recent, and ongoing, developments in neuroscience may provide a more concrete view of what emotions and feelings are and how they work and influence our everyday life (Kringelbach 2007) than philosophical abstractions. I have provided a detailed account of Damasio's theory of emotions and feelings elsewhere (Marranci 2006: 31–52), however, because readers unacquainted with Damasio's theory and my understanding of human identity will find it extremely difficult to make sense of the forthcoming sections and chapters in this book, I shall summarise the main tenets of both.

Starting from the Brain

We will begin from what seems to be a simple question, and yet as we have seen above is not: what are emotions? To answer this question, Damasio first recognises that the word 'emotion' tends, in everyday language, to encompass the notion of 'feeling'. For clarity, he suggests a technical distinction between emotions and feelings (see also Kringelbach 2004). Referring to emotion as the organism's reaction to external or internal stimuli, Damasio has differentiated feelings as being mental representations of the body-state; they are the private experience of emotions, inaccessible to observation, and consequently to other fellow humans. Damasio has then observed that emotions pertain to the bodily domain, while feelings to the mind. Accordingly, we first have emotions and then the feelings that are caused by them. While emotions do not become part of the mind, as they are strictly reactions to external stimuli, feelings become a significant part of the mind as the lasting memory of emotions. In other words, happiness, joy, love, empathy and other more complex 'sentiments' are not (as common sense understands them) emotions but rather, in Damasio's terms, feelings,

The processing of emotions involves this dual track: the flowing of mental contents that bring along the triggers for the emotional responses, and the executed responses, and the executed responses themselves, those that constitute emotions, which eventually lead to feelings. The chain that begins with the triggering of emotions and continues

with the execution of emotion continues with the establishment of the substrates for feeling in the appropriate body-sensing brain regions.

(Damasio 2004: 65)

From this perspective of emotions and feelings we can just now understand how the experience of prison environment cues may have a greater, and direct, impact upon the individual than previously recognised within the social sciences. Since feelings are the result of emotions, and emotions are triggered by environmental cues, prison has a real power to shape how one feels, and consequently the cognitive processes with which views are formed, the world understood and reality made sense of. Yet emotions and feelings are not just related to how people make sense of their surroundings as they also shape and are part of how people 'feel to be' (Marranci 2006), that is, form their identity.

Identity as 'Feeling to Be'

Damasio has also explained how the process of feeling is linked to consciousness and ultimately to the formation of the self, 'in plain terms, we are not able to feel if we are not conscious. But it so happens that the machinery of feeling is itself a contributor to the processes of consciousness, namely to the creation of the self, without which nothing can be known' (2004: 110). In social sciences, there is an abundance of terms referring to identity and its components, but this is not 'excessive terminology' per se. However, because this vocabulary has become 'common sense' from one study to another, it has consequently lost its specification. 'Identity', 'self-identity', 'personal identity', 'self', 'selfhood', 'personhood', 'I', 'me', 'Me' and many other terms have become synonyms. In reality there is a clear distinction between self and identity. In neurobiological terms, evolutionary processes have created different stages of 'self'; the simplest of which are what Damasio has called 'proto-selves'. Human beings possess all the different stages of the self, with the autobiographical-self being uniquely human.

All living organisms (even mono cellular paramecia) have *proto-selves* that are composed of an unconscious system that can be described as 'a coherent collection of neural patterns which map, moment by moment, the state of the physical structure of the organism in its many dimensions' (Damasio 2000: 154). Although the proto-self remains useful for simple organisms, it could not efficiently serve new, more complex organisms. They required a

complex ‘control system’ between internal functions and external reality. This need led to the formation of *core self*, which is based on what Damasio has called *core consciousness*. As he emphasises, although the core self is formed through a conscious process, we hardly notice the process itself, since ‘the images that dominate the mental display are those of the things of which you are now conscious’ (2000: 172). However, memory also plays a fundamental role in human self. Indeed, ‘reactivations and display of selected sets of autobiographical memories’ (Damasio 2000: 196) together with the core self, are what form the *autobiographical-self*, or what normally in everyday life we simply call ‘self’. Convincing clinical examples, based on patients with particular types of brain damage, have demonstrated that without autobiographical memories our sense of self (i.e. our sense of past, future and historical-temporal continuity) could not be developed: literally, without it, a person loses oneself.

All of this tells us something important about the distinction that exists – and has been so often ignored within the field of social sciences – between self (i.e. autobiographical-self in Damasio’s terminology) and identity. While the self is a real entity in our neurocognitive system, *identity is not*. According to Damasio, identity ‘is a delicately shaped machinery of our imagination [which] stakes the probabilities of selection toward the same, historically continuous self’. I fully agree with Damasio’s concept of identity. Yet I suggest that we need to emphasise that identity is a *process* (Marranci 2006) that allows human beings to make sense of their autobiographical-self and, at the same time, to express it, especially through symbols.

Now we can observe that humans live in a sort of tautological circuit: (1) the environment produces stimuli; (2) which produce emotions (the bodily reactions); (3) which human beings perceive and rationalise as feelings; (4) which affect their autobiographical-self; (5) which is experienced through the delicately shaped machinery of their imagination (identities); (6) which is affected by the feelings induced by the emotions. What I have described until now is a circuit of causalities based on information both internal and external to the individual, in other words, an ecological system of identity. Therefore, a person affirming ‘I am Muslim’, in terms of emotions and feelings affirms ‘I *feel* to be Muslim’. Hence, it is what we *feel* to be that determines how the ‘machinery of our imagination’ will ‘[stake] the probabilities of selection toward the same, historically continuous self’ and how it will be presented to others.

Hence, I suggest that Muslim prisoners are ‘Muslims’ as long as they ‘feel to be’ Muslim, and not because the ‘system of symbols’ called Islam *makes* them Muslim. This is particularly relevant in the case of prison. We have

seen how prison officers and non-Muslim prisoners form their idea of who the 'real' Muslim is based on the religious practice of the individual. In a certain sense, prison officers often adopt a constructivist view of identity, where a person is considered Muslim if he or she does what Muslims *are expected* to do. Furthermore, many Muslims would agree to varying degrees with this system of classification. However, from an individual viewpoint, if identity, for the reasons discussed above, is 'what you *feel* to be', a Muslim prisoner can fully *feel* Muslim even though he or she does not respect the tenets of Islam as they are socially understood. Indeed, it is neither the 'practice' itself nor the 'system of symbols' that makes one feel Muslim, but rather those elements, including emotions, which contribute to the autobiographical-self, and then that imaginary machinery which we call identity makes sense of it. There is not, at least from the perspective of the individual, such thing as a 'good Muslim' or a 'bad Muslim', but rather only people who 'feel to be Muslim'. Theology, here, has no relevance and this explains the reason for which Islam in prison is *more* than a 'religion' or a 'faith', and why there is much more at stake than just the defence of an idea.

The Homeostasis of the Self: Avoiding Crisis

Somebody may at this point ask why, since we have an autobiographical-self, do we need, as human beings, a process like 'identity'? The answer is that we require it for the very same reason for which we have emotions, feelings and the autobiographical-self: to regulate life. We need to maintain equilibrium between our internal milieu and the external environments since 'that continuous attempt at achieving a state of positively regulated life is a deep and defining part of our existence' (Damasio 2004: 36). Nonetheless, we live in environments that continually change, and so challenge us in endless ways. Since humans are social beings, many challenges exist because we live in communities and societies. Prison is simultaneously ever-changing and the same. Routine and boredom, as we have seen, inflict pain upon the prisoner, yet no less does the fear of unexpected events, such as a new cellmate, or a move to another prison and so forth. Prison is contradiction in essence. Prison also necessitates interaction within a confined space, which means not all interactions are welcomed.

Bateson, while studying the Iatmul tribe (1936) had noticed that the relationship between various types of kin were characterised by 'interchanges of behaviour such as that the more A exhibited a given behaviour, the more B was likely to exhibit the same behaviour' (Bateson 2002: 98).

Bateson called these kinds of relationships symmetrical changes. However, he also noticed another pattern in which the behaviour of B, although being different from that of A, was complementary to it. According to Bateson (2000: 323), examples of simple symmetrical changes are armament races, athletic emulation and boxing matches; while examples of complementary changes are dominance–submission, sadism–masochism, spectatorship–exhibitionism. It is not difficult to recognise that the majority of cases in prison are examples of complementary changes. Both symmetrical and complementary changes are subject to forms of progressive escalation, which Bateson has called schismogenesis. By affecting the relationship between the elements of the circuit, schismogenesis (both symmetrical and complementary) have the power to break down the circular system. In our context of prison, this means that schismogenic processes can seriously challenge the way in which a person ‘feels to be’.

The only solution, therefore, is to reinforce or counterbalance, meaning in this case complementary changes. This solution manifests itself in the performance of an ‘act’ to change reality, in particular to create ‘emotions’ which can lead to feelings conducive to the reinforcement of that ‘feeling to be’ so important for the individual(s)’s psychological (and consequently physical) well-being. For this reason, we may speak of ‘acts of identity’ (Marranci 2006). These ‘acts’, though not all the time violent, tend to be radical or extreme in their nature. Of course, I suggest that the most radical of all acts of identity that a human being can commit is paradoxically suicide. Since Islam, as we have seen, is part of the identity of many Muslim prisoners, we need to understand how ‘faith’ is part of this discourse.

Faith

People may be religious for various reasons, express religiosity differently and adhere to the practice and theology of religions to varying degrees. However, one element remains essential to the experience of religion: faith. Faith, of course, can be sincere or insincere, but without ‘faith’ there cannot be religious experience and, in particular, religious identity based on it. Statements such as ‘I am a Muslim’ means that the person at least declares that he has faith in his or her understanding of Islam. Needless to say, personal faith in a religion,⁴ can be tailored according to personal views, group doctrines and so forth. Yet what is ‘faith’ and what relationship does it have to personal identity? The anthropological study of ‘faith’ is quite neglected since anthropologists generally have focused more upon ‘groups’

than individuals, and also they have studied religion as a system instead of as a personal expression of faith institutionalised. Even in recent cognitive theories of religion (see for instance Whitehouse 2004 and Tremplin 2006) it is difficult to find the term 'faith' mentioned in the index. The wider debate consists of mainly theological, or psychological, studies attempting to discuss the role of religious faith in recovering patients or in the support of the terminally ill. Although the theological debate about faith may be interesting, it is not useful in our understanding of Muslim prisoners' experience of Islam. Indeed, it would be difficult to argue that Muslims in prison turn to, or back to, Islam as a main element of their identity because of their theological knowledge. As any prison imam knows, Muslim prisoners often do not even know how to pray correctly, let alone form their own faith through theological theories or debates. With few exceptions, faith in prison is not the result of an intellectual commitment.

To have faith means to *believe*. As Todd has noticed, 'Personal beliefs and personal knowledge are part of the same system of reflection, and both are drawn on to perceive, interpret, and interact with the objects and events that make up daily life' (2006: 135). Beliefs, Sperber (1996) has explained, are mental representations that can be classified into two main kinds that differ in how they originate, how they are used and the strength that they possess. *Intuitive beliefs* are commonsensical descriptions of the surrounding world; they are directly derived from interacting with our external world and are intuitive both for the cognitive mechanisms they involve and because they are often held unconsciously. Because of its nature, this kind of belief is particularly strong. For instance, an intuitive belief is the idea that you cannot walk on water or that you need to breathe to survive and so on. *Reflective beliefs* derive from conscious processes involving reasoning, or information provided by agents in a position of authority, such as teachers, parents and of course books. While intuitive beliefs describe more than explain, reflective beliefs are explanatory in essence. Of course, reflective beliefs, because of their nature, may be discarded by some or dogmatically held by others. Therefore, while intuitive beliefs are innate and universal, because of being based within the human cognitive system, reflective beliefs may or may not be universal and generally display far more variation. However, reflective beliefs are not fully independent since '[they are] interpretations of representations embedded in the validating context of an intuitive belief' (Sperber 1996: 89). Emotions play a fundamental role in both intuitive beliefs and reflective beliefs, but feelings have an even stronger function in reflective beliefs.

We ultimately have beliefs in order to orient ourselves within the world. They are shortcuts so that we do not need to 'test' the representation of our mental objects continuously. We know that a stone propelled towards the sky will have to come down. We do not need to test this each time it crosses our minds. Similar to reflective beliefs, once we have accepted that the law of gravity explains an object's attraction towards the soil, we do not need to challenge this belief again and again. Trust has certainly a role in how we hold and maintain our beliefs. Faith is a reflective belief. Faith is the ultimate form of trust: indeed, who better than Abraham, who was ready to sacrifice his son, can represent within monotheistic religions the faithful man who trusted God beyond nationality and ethnicity (Kierkegaard 1985)? Misztal (1996: 18) has suggested, 'to trust is to believe despite uncertainty.' Surely, this definition embraces the deep implications in the act of trusting, which means to battle with one of the most natural reactions we have developed through evolution: the fear of unknown (Luhmann 2000). Trust is mainly used, as terminology, to indicate a human-to-human relationship, and when trust is placed in the supernatural or a supernatural being, we generally speak of faith. Although there are many points of contact between trust and faith, there is an essential difference. Imagine, for a moment, that you are speaking to a dentist who informs you that you need an extraction. Surgery is unpleasant and you would of course prefer to avoid it. You do not know this dentist and you do not understand odontology, but you do know that he is indeed a dentist, you are speaking with him, you can question him, see his qualifications and so forth. You decide to trust him. In other words, you believe that you need an extraction and that he is capable of carrying out the procedure correctly. Although there are many uncertainties and unknowns, there are some elements that help you to overcome the natural 'distrust' that we have towards them. In the case of faith, you are dealing with abstract ideas and narratives that cannot be tested or even supported by apparent rational factuality. Faith, as an old saying suggests, is blind.

Unsurprisingly, studies have suggested that even in the case of elements that may substantially contradict, or challenge, the tenets on which personal religious faith is based, we can observe no reduction of commitment but rather an increase in faith (Festinger et al. 1956). To illustrate, in natural catastrophes, despite that the poorest and most vulnerable individuals are often the ones who suffer the most, it is generally the rich (see, for instance, the dramatic case of the 2005 flooding in New Orleans) who are most likely to question their faith in a just God. In contrast, as several

studies have demonstrated (Hardyck and Braden 1962), we can find that religiosity among the most affected increases and their faith strengthens. This is, as we can see, exceptionally unlike the case of the dentist who may extract the wrong tooth in your mouth: you would of course never use his services again. But if you believe in God, you are ready to trust him again (or better, you never ceased trusting God) even if your prayers resulted in a worse reality instead of a better one. Studies such as Batson (1975) have argued that 'cognitive dissonance can occur when a cherished belief is disconfirmed, leading to the use of dissonance-reducing strategies such as belief intensification' (Burris et al. 1997: 18). This phenomenon helps to explain why prisoners who prayed for a favourable conclusion of their court cases would continue to have 'faith in Allah and Islam' even after a negative outcome.

It is not only cognitive scientists who have tried to make sense of the mechanisms behind beliefs, especially those of a religious nature. Others, in the field of neurophenology have declared that faith, spirituality and religion have an allocated space and function within the brain. Although classic neurophenology has suffered from extreme reductionism, and today we know that no one particular region of the brain can master complex ideas such as 'spirituality' or 'religion' (Damasio 2004), recent studies have shown that the brain is certainly involved. Newberg and D'Aquili (1999) have conducted research on faith and spirituality using neural imaging technology which allows the observation of neurological activities associated with religious experiences (such as prayers, meditation and so on). They observed that during these religious experiences the 'orientation association' regions of the brain⁵ were temporarily deactivated, forcing the brain to find alternative routes to maintain a sense of spatial dimensions. Among the areas which were activated in lieu of the 'orientation association' area was the 'attention association' one. The two authors argue that it is this change of neurological route connections that provides the spiritual experience. Newberg and D'Aquili have also noticed that 'part of the reason the attention association area is activated during spiritual practices such as meditation is because it is *heavily involved in emotional response* – and religious experiences are usually highly emotional. So it seems reasonable that the attention association area must have some important interaction with other brain structures underlying emotion during meditative and religious states' (2001: 34, emphasis added). We are back in the domain of emotions, feelings and of course self processes, such as the proto-self, core self and finally the autobiographical-self.

It is safe to assume, following the above theory of emotion and feelings, that the self is affected by what we call faith. Faith, as any other human experience, is the result of external–internal communication between the brain and the environment; however, it is ultimately experienced in the brain and as an emotional-feeling process, ‘Spiritual experiences, religious or otherwise are mental processes [. . .] [it] is a particular kind of feeling state. [. . .] Sustaining such states depends on a wealth of thoughts about the condition of the self and the condition of other selves, about past and future, about both concrete and abstract conception of our nature’ (Damasio 2004: 284 and 286). Therefore, it would not be too hazardous to conclude that what we call ‘faith’ is in reality a powerful lasting feeling. Certainly, Geertz’s ‘system of symbols’ remains an unconvincing agent for establishing and controlling ‘(1) powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men’; it is too abstract for ‘(2) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence’; and extremely removed from our brain function for ‘(3) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (4) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic’ (Geertz 1985: 4). By contrast the process in which feelings are formed in our neurobiological system and inform our autobiographical-self is a much better candidate for such functions. The feeling of ‘faith’, similar to other feelings such as empathy, is not the product of ‘symbols’. Instead, feelings such as these are the result of complex neurological-mental processes that have developed from the relationship between brain and environment as a by-product of the struggle to maintain equilibrium – something which is as essential to our well-being as it is to the rest of the known universe.

Islam as Act of Identity and Faith within Prisons

To be a Muslim in prison is not easy. In a closed society in which identity matters and is often a tool for power struggle and maintaining status (Sykes 1958), to be assigned, or express, an identity is not without consequences. Yet in prison, as I could quickly grasp from my observations, social identity appears to be marked more by how a person behaves than how he or she self-identifies.⁶ Social identity in prisons is very much the product of shared stereotypes based on pre-defined roles. Officers and prisoners may share some of the same stereotypes. In the case of Muslims, a significant number of both the prison officers and the non-Muslim prisoners demonstrated that they shared between them a similar classification of Muslims. An officer at a Cat B prison asked me during my first visit

to the establishment, 'so, what kind of Muslim prisoners are you interested in?' I presumed that he was asking about the ethnicity, age and length of the sentences among my possible sample. Instead he clarified, 'We have all types of Muslims here, some are so because they are Asians, others because of the food, others for association and then there are the real ones.' Intrigued by the classification, I asked about the rationale behind the categorisation,

Well – he replied – the converts are often in the category food-Muslims. Many are just Asians, you know. They are supposed to be Muslims, but they eat during Ramadan, avoid prayers and sometimes they have that kind of posters – pointing through the barred door of a cell to a cut-out from page three of *The Sun*⁷ – and finally there are the ones who really respect their religion, but the majority are quite fanatic. You recognise them because after a while you see them with the cap, beard and rosary [tasbir] and they are all about halal and haram.

It was clear that both officers and prisoners paid attention to changes in dress style and physical appearance, and also certain 'Islamic' mannerisms, in order to develop 'categories' which could help them to distinguish, for instance, the 'food-Muslims' from the committed ones.

Classifications are very important for prison life and Muslim prisoners themselves had a system of classification for evaluating fellow Muslims that was based on similar elements, such as respect of the five daily prayers, Ramadan fasting and attention to halal rules. One of the most common 'detectors' of 'fake' or 'uncommitted' Muslims was the attendance of the Friday prayer and whether a person tried to always sit in the back rows. Of course, sitting in such position facilitates chatting with other prisoners or exchanging 'contraband',⁸ as Yusuf (25-year-old of Pakistani origin) explained,

We can't know who is a real Muslim or not; we can only accept that they are. But there are some who have really bad behaviour and you know that they say 'I am Muslim' because they want to get out of their pad, and chat with others or even fight with others [during the Friday prayers], and some also exchange drugs. So, we know that they are Muslim only because they want to do that – but you still hope that, *inshallah*, they can become good Muslims in any case. You never know how Allah will bring you Islam.

During my research I met prisoners for whom the ethnic identity included the religious one, 'I am Pakistani, so I am Muslim. They are the same thing',

and also others for whom the socially imposed religious identity was lived as a burden:

I don't care about religion. I am from a Bangladeshi family. Here they call me Paki, and so I can be only a Muslim. To be a Paki in prison is not nice, and to be Muslim in this prison is even worse. So, I do not care about religion and I try to say so. Don't want other problems.

For many, however, the experience of prison coincided with a religious awakening and rediscovery of Islam,

I stopped practising at the age of ten, but now here I feel that the Qur'an has a special meaning for me. I think that Allah sent me here to learn about Him and become a good Muslim.

Finally during my research, I had the opportunity to observe that Islam also has a specific value within the complex 'politics' of prison. As we have noticed in the previous chapter, Islam may help to soften divisions existing among the different ethnic groups forming the Muslim prison population. It may also help to secure the much needed 'trust' and 'protection' for surviving everyday challenges. This is particularly true for some prisoners sentenced for certain crimes, such as sexual offences, who risk being abused and attacked by other fellow prisoners. A Scottish Muslim convert, who was sentenced to life recalled,

I am a sex offender, and I have been accused of rape. Sex offenders risk a lot in prison. We don't have friends here, only enemies. My life was hellish. Also prison was different when I arrived here at the beginning of my sentence. I started to know Muslims here. Not many, but the few that came in. Islam intrigued me, but also I noticed that they were kind to me because I was interested in Islam. I converted and I was accepted. I have changed now. To know that you are part of one group helps a lot here. So, I converted also for this reason – but then Islam entered more and more in my heart. Allah knows the best.

In a majority of cases, Muslims can trust Muslims. Even those Muslims who are not practising, but are still recognised as Muslims, will be defended and protected by other Muslims within the prison.

Beyond faith, Islam in prison also has social capital. To be part of a group is quite strategic within prison life and can help to resolve, or ease, everyday issues faced by prisoners. For instance, Muslims can help each other in the

so-called prison economy, 'We help each other in any case. If you are Muslim, you receive help from the brothers – such as exchanging goods, helping with an extra towel or phone cards, things like that'; personal security, 'Even if some are not good Muslims, they say they are Muslims and we have to stick together if needed. A loner is always a victim'; and psychological support, 'There are people here that suffer, but you cannot show that you are weak, you know? With brothers it is different; you feel that you can cry if you need.'

Hence many are the reasons for which prisoners may decide to emphasise their Muslim identity. Not all, however, are the result of a free or strategic decision. Hidden from the eyes of the authorities, as well as overlooked in the few studies of Muslims in prison (Beckford et al. 2005), I have observed what we can call Muslim-to-Muslim bullying motivated by 'religious' reasons. This kind of bullying entails the coercion of a prisoner of Muslim background, who however did not practise or wish to emphasise his religiosity, to join the 'pious' Muslims by growing a beard, going to Friday prayers and accepting the internal in-group leadership. The first time I observed this much hidden reality was in a young offender's institution in England. Zahik, a 16-year-old of Pakistani origin observed:

I didn't want to have trouble. I will be here for no more than one year and a few months. I'm not particularly religious and I didn't want to be part of any group. Well, some brothers approached me and insisted that I go to the prayer and hang around with them. When I let on that I was not interested, they insisted more and more and even threatened me and told me that if a gora attacked me they will let him. I was scared and so I followed them. After a while one of them was put with me in my cell. I was checked and controlled. I have pain in my stomach, but I was forced to fast, and not only for Ramadan.

This was not an isolated case. It is clear that, although today prisons have Muslim imams, there is also an informal hierarchy of leadership, as in other prison groups that hold authority, which can challenge (or influence) the imams. Indeed, as we have discussed in the Introduction, the prison imam is considered part of the official structure of the prison and Muslim prisoners expect that his allegiance is ultimately towards the Prison Service.

Many are the reasons for which a prisoner of Muslim background may decide to emphasise his or her identity as a Muslim. Some motivations, as we have just mentioned, can even be the result of pressure. In any case, all are the result of the prison environment. The overall majority of my

respondents during interviews honestly admitted that they would have probably never gone 'back to Islam' had they not been arrested and detained. Muslims in prison may adopt Islam as an 'act of identity', an 'act of faith' or any form in between. Of those whom I interviewed, a majority who demonstrated a great commitment to Islam, and thus as part of their self *and* identity, rediscovered (or, in the case of converts, discovered) it through the crisis suffered from incarceration (see also Toch 1977, 1975). Fear, as emotion, played the main role in the process of rediscovering Islam. As Toch has observed,

Fear, in other words, is more – much more – than awareness of danger. It is that too, and in this sense it represents an indictment of settings in which the unscrupulous are left free to terrorize their fellows. But fear is also an index of self-worth, and it is used for this purpose by victims and predators – and spectators. And fear is paralyzing and incapacitating, and leads toward self-entrapment. Fear also makes men vulnerable: fearful men become more dependent than most on the support of their fellows. (1975: 73)

The experience of fear provoked by the prison environment has shaken prisoners' own certainties. My respondents reacted to this emotion in two main ways, leading to two different modes of 'experiencing' Islam. The first way (among a minority) is what we can call the 'feeling of wonder'. Fuller has observed, 'Wonder responds to unexpected features of our environment by setting us in search of causality, agency, and intentionality responsible for these potentially harmful or helpful phenomena' (2007: 16). Prisoners of Muslim backgrounds (as well as some converts) shocked by the unexpected features of prison and shaken by the emotion of fear, experienced the feeling of wonder, and through it, started to make sense of their autobiographical-self by means of Islam as an identity. Islam became an 'act of faith' which could link their autobiographical-self to their experience of prison, which in many cases became eschatological. This group of Muslims tends to live the prison sentence, amid such 'feeling of wonder', as a deeply personal experience.

Yet if the prison environment provokes in few the 'feeling of wonder', in many others it facilitates another process: what Wiktorowicz (2005) has called *cognitive opening* (see also Chapter 6). In some cases, the cognitive opening results in people seeking new answers to their questions and doubts. Since for some people religion can begin to take on a new meaning due to a crisis, a cognitive opening can push them to explore their religion

beyond the usual mainstream forms. In these cases, Islam becomes more an act of identity than of faith. 'Moral shocks' (Wiktorowicz 2005: 21) can not only facilitate but also increase the experience of cognitive opening, which is a process also linked to emotions and feelings. Among the various moral shocks, which some Muslim prisoners experience in prison, there are lack of dignity, de-humanisation through inescapable prison rules, and sexual practices perceived, within the prison culture, as 'deviant' and 'amoral'. A number of Muslims also experience what I have called 'moral contradictions', such as in the case where Muslims voluntarily, or forcibly,⁹ perform a sexual act (i.e. masturbation and homosexual acts) that contradicts their 'feeling to be Muslim'. Prison is an emotional space – but it is also a space which prisoners must make sense of in order to survive and maintain a healthy autobiographical-self.

Schismogenic processes are a serious threat to prisoners' identity and consequently also their autobiographical-self. Toch has rightly observed, 'it is not the most maltreated inmate who breaks down. It is, rather, the inmate whose norms about the way one must be treated are most violated, the inmate who holds uncompromising expectations of his environment' (1975: 37). The trauma of living in situations in which personal dignity can be compromised, as well as one's own sexuality challenged, may be addressed in different ways: from self-harm to violent acts, or, as in the case of some of my respondents, blaming 'injustice'. For instance, an interviewee described a homosexual act in which he was involved as the result of being treated unjustly in prison:

I did it; we both did. We both were Muslim and we knew then that it was wrong doing it. But we are young and you know . . . you should have a wife by now. We are not homo – just forced to do it because of this prison, this is what these kafirs want us to be. They want us to be homo, pussy so that we cannot change this fucking unjust world. Now I pray more and I am stronger. I should be a better Muslim and give my life for Islam.

As we discuss in the next section, dignity and the idea of 'justice' play an extraordinary role in how Muslims in prison make sense of Islam and their identities, especially when they rediscover Islam as part of a 'cognitive opening' rather than as part of a 'feeling of wonder'.

Of course, prison amplifies not only voices, sounds and light but also emotions, and thus feelings, and reactions to the surroundings. Prison is an extreme place by definition. Prisoners, and also prison staff (Crawley 2004; Tracy 2008), often develop a strong viewpoint on virtually everything:

football, politics, food, women (or men) and, of course, Islam. The central element of this process is what I call *radical dualism*. My observations have suggested that prisoners tend to think in dualistic terms more often than in ordinary circumstances because of the environment in which they have to survive. The prison world is divided into prisoners and 'screws' (prison slang for officers), friends and enemies, good and evil and so forth. Simple classification marks everyday social and emotional transactions within prison. Individual prisoners may be more or less affected by radical dualism, but it surely has an impact on how they understand not only their life in prison, but also the outside world, as one prisoner observed,

In prison you stay on the safe side. Who is not your friend is your enemy until he proves the contrary. The world here is divided between prisoners and screws, between strong and weak people and between winners and losers. There are not many colours in prison, you have to make your decisions and if you make the wrong one, you pay for it.

It is not difficult to understand how Islam can become part of this dualistic prison thinking.

The majority of my respondents divide the prison world into Muslim and non-Muslim, halal and haram, and Islamic and un-Islamic. These categories have emotional value and they certainly help to delimit not only group identities but personal ones as well. As we have seen, internal categories among the Muslims include that of 'good Muslim' and 'bad Muslim'. Shi'a Muslims were generally not considered bad Muslims, but rather, as we have discussed, non-Muslims and part of the 'kafir' category. Some Muslim prisoners, however, developed an extreme version of this dualism and started to isolate themselves from the rest of the prison population. Their world then shrinks into a smaller group of trusted 'brothers', and radical dualism becomes the lens through which they see the prison, their fellow Muslims, the external world and also themselves. Radical dualism, in this case, becomes part of how they 'feel to be Muslims'. It is not a coincidence that within my sample of Muslim prisoners, those who were affected by strong forms of 'Islamic' radical dualism were also generally those who had suffered discrimination, threats, degrading treatment, abuse and various types of 'moral contradictions'. During the interviews it was also clear that for them, despite the beards and Islamic outfits, Islam was more an 'act of identity' than an 'act of faith'. In other words, Islam was 'ideological' and highly emotional. Their experience of prison as 'cognitive opening' was prompted not only by the emotion of fear but also hate and anger.

Careful cross checking with both officers and other prisoners confirmed that the majority of these Muslims, who displayed such strong forms of Islamic radical dualism, entered prison without such views, and rather, as the majority of Muslim prisoners, exhibited very little interest in religion before prison. It was also apparent that they were not 'radicalised' by external people or reading material. Instead, the process through which they had formed their extreme 'Islamic' radical dualism had more to do with their prison environment. Certainly, the post-9/11 overemphasis on Islam, the security concerns surrounding Islam in prison and certain draconian decisions intended to 'avoid' radicalisation among Muslim inmates have facilitated that the radical dualism already existing within prison became, in the case of some Muslims, extreme and part of their 'feeling to be' Muslim.

Conclusions

The great majority of Muslim prisoners have not actively practised Islam since their teenage years. However, in many cases, after only a few hours or days in prison they rediscover Islam as religion. Muslims are heterogeneous not only in their various ethnicities, genders, ages, Islamic beliefs, but also in the ways they make sense of Islam as identity. Muslims in prison are no different. We have seen that Muslims can emphasise their religion within prison for many reasons, some of which can be explained as part of survival strategies. Fear, none the less, has a major role to play in how Islam is re-enhanced as part of identity. All these different modalities, however, have a commonality: they are the result of emotional processes. Having rejected a constructivist approach, I have suggested that we need to understand the relationship between brain and environment to identify such processes. I have adopted Damasio's study of emotions and feelings to demonstrate how environmental cues have a direct impact upon how we perceive not only the surroundings but also ourselves.

Feelings are essential in maintaining an autobiographical-self and we have observed that what we call 'faith' is part of such process. Faith, far from being a 'system of symbols', is a product of our brain. Faith can be experienced in different ways, and I have suggested that the emotion of fear, so common among prisoners, has facilitated the experience of 'wonder' for some. Indeed, it is through 'wonder' that some Muslim prisoners rediscover Islam. Their autobiographical-self, and the identity that both makes sense of it and expresses it, reacts to the schismogenic environment of prison with Islam as an 'act of faith'.

Yet the majority, I have suggested, instead of rediscovering Islam through the feeling of wonder, do so through the experience of cognitive opening, which is nevertheless still facilitated by the emotion of fear. Many of these individuals, however, had tough experiences of prison that have reinforced the schismogenic aspects and contradicted their expectations of dignity and perceptions of how they should be treated. Islam, in these cases, tends to become more of an 'act of identity' so that their autobiographical-self can reacquire the stability it needs to avoid a dangerous crisis. Furthermore, it is not only the emotion of fear that plays a role in this process, but also hate and anger provoked by the contradictions that these Muslims have to face.

In prison we can observe that 'dual thinking' is extremely common. The social restrictions, the forced contact with others and the need to control a challenging environment facilitate simplifications, so that stereotypes are extremely common. I have explained in this chapter how this common way of making sense of reality can, in certain circumstances, become particularly radical. Radical dualism is dogmatic and aggressive in its expression. Of course, it is not difficult to see how some Muslims might use radical dualism as an act of identity, in which case we may speak of an Islamic radical dualism. I have finally discussed how this *forma mentis* can develop without actual indoctrination or external resources, such as radical literature or other material.

Notes

¹ It is important to stress that western scholars and 'western culture' have neither been the first nor the only ones interested in the phenomena of emotions, neither have they been the most prolific in providing explanations. In many other cultures, the question of emotion has impelled researchers in different times and in various places such as China and India or the Arab countries. The results of such investigations resulted in no less sophisticated philosophic and scientific answers (see Shweder and Haidt 2000).

² Among many other scholars privileging such constructivist approaches to emotions, it is worth mentioning Rosaldo 1984; Wentworth and Yardley 1994; and Lupton 1998.

³ Lyon 1998; Hochschild 1998; Williams 2001; Parkinson 1995.

⁴ This is especially true in the case of Islam, which is without a recognised central religious authority.

⁵ Posterior section of the parietal lobe involved in the sensory processes that provides a sense of body boundary in relation with the external environment.

⁶ It is important to remember that in my above explanation of identity I have focused on the personal formation of identity, the 'feeling to be'. Of course, there is also a

social dimension that consists of what people 'feel you to be'. Often, the two may not coincide.

⁷ *The Sun* has a long-standing tradition of publishing pictures of a topless young woman on its third page.

⁸ For example, the exchange of forbidden articles such as mobile phones or drugs.

⁹ And fear is paralysing and incapacitating, and leads towards self-entrapment. Fear also makes men vulnerable: fearful men become more dependent Toch 1975: 73.

Chapter 6

The Shahadah of Freedom: From Doctrinal to Imagistic Modes of Islam

Much has been discussed in the mass media as well as among experts, politicians and Prison Service officials about the radicalisation¹ of Muslim prisoners. In this chapter, I will offer a reading of how some Muslim prisoners experience Islam as something more than a set of beliefs and practices. During my fieldwork I have observed that Muslims in prison, even more than outside it (Marranci 2009), linked the idea of justice to that of dignity. As you can expect, prison inevitably reduces the level of personal dignity prisoners were used to in the outside world. This has far more consequences for the prisoners who have clear expectations of how they should be treated.

The chasm often existing between expectations and reality, in concomitance with the fear of life within prison, pushes some prisoners to develop their understanding of Islam more as an act of identity than as an act of faith. In these cases, central to the understanding of themselves, the prison environment, and the world in general is a radical dualistic worldview in which tawhid, the oneness of God, is transformed from a theological tenet into an ideological tool of survival and a mechanism to maintain one's own autobiographical-self.

Not all Muslim prisoners who adhere to this ideology – developed not by means of material culture but rather through the cognitive and emotional experience of the physical and social prison environment – can be defined as ‘extremists’ or ‘radicals’. Rather my research suggests that another element is needed: the shift from a doctrinal mode of Islamic religiosity to an imagistic one (Whitehouse 2004). I will explain how prisoners of Muslim background, after having ceased practising Islam in their early teens, rediscover their religion more through an ‘epiphany’ than a theological commitment. This process has an impact upon how some Muslims react to the official version of Islam, as sponsored by the prison authorities and which the figure of the prison imam embodies.

Between the Feeling of Dignity and the Ethos of Justice

As we have seen, dignity is difficult to maintain in prison, despite regulations and efforts to do so. Yet ‘maintaining dignity’ is essential to the survival of prison (Gutterman 1992) and as one of my respondents reminded me, ‘losing face is serious stuff in prison’. We all have a concept, a conscious idea, of what dignity means. Some aspects of how we make sense of dignity are certainly socially determined but others are innate and part of our autobiographical-self. Identity, what I have defined as ‘the feeling to be’, plays a fundamental role in expressing and maintaining dignity. Indeed, people may feel ‘undignified’, and consequently feel offended, when their identities are disrespected through the actions and words of others. Notwithstanding the relevance that dignity has in everyday life, abstractly explaining it remains a challenge for most.

Philosophers have often wrestled with the concept. Kant, in his list of ‘categorical imperatives’, has identified dignity as the second. Humans as persons (i.e. possessing what Kant has defined as moral practical reason) should treat themselves and others never simply as a means, but always as an end (Kant 1964). Dignity, for Kant, is an absolute inner worth. It is through this worth, *Menschenwürde*, that humans can derive respect from each other (Korner 1990; O’Neill 1989).

Time has passed since Kant’s writings. Today it may be a surprise to discover that academic literature on dignity is extremely sparse, despite the fact that catchphrases such as ‘respect for human dignity’, ‘the right to dignity’, ‘treatment with dignity’, and even ‘death with dignity’ are very successful in the current world of ideas (Gaylin 1984). Kant’s definition of dignity, though very much rooted in Western thought, has some universal elements: dignity is *Menschenwürde* and it is also the result of how we react to the environment, how certain environments impact on our autobiographical-self by provoking emotions and, in this case, a feeling of dignity. It is undeniable that memory has a fundamental role in the process, but despite the different contexts that colour how dignity is defined and expressed, the feeling that we call dignity exists in all groups and among all humans. It is also true that this feeling is relational – for it to exist, there must be a number of humans who interact. Nobody can feel ‘undignified’ (i.e. humiliated, dishonoured or the equivalent in other languages) by the actions of his or her own cat, dog or other animal. Dignity cannot be perceived or expressed other than within the dynamics of human relations:

Social dignity concerns our social relationships and *Menschenwürde* relates to our affinity with other human beings, as members of the human

species. Both incorporate notions of mutual trust and obligation, of self-esteem and self-respect that reflect the psychological *feelings* that constitute *our emotional dignity*, factors vitally important to the well-being of those individuals able to appreciate and act on them. (Badcott 2003: 126, emphasis added)

Of course, the relationship between the experience of the environment, the emotions it provoked, the context and the recollection of our selective memory produce bias which changes the links between the emotional experience of dignity and other 'ideas' such as honour, patriotism, altruism, justice, compassion and mercy (see Wilson 1999: 279–82). Since, 'conscience and emotional dignity are vital components of a sense of self, and importantly, awareness of self (self-regard) opens the door to awareness of others as others (other regard). And the relationships between self and others constitute the arena for all social intercourse including expressions of concern and respect' (Badcott 2003: 125).

During my 4 years of research on Muslim prisoners, I have observed that dignity was often a 'sore point'. Muslims often perceived that their dignity was at best ignored and at worst purposely attacked, both as individuals and as a group. From halal meat to full searches, from offensive jokes to nicknaming, from respect for their families to respect for their ethnicity, Muslims in prison at times interpreted the simple mistakes of officers, or certain prison rules, as an assault upon their dignity. Although many accidents that made Muslim prisoners feel 'undignified' were truly mistakes and misunderstandings, sometimes the provocation was gratuitous, fully intentional and planned. The majority of these provocations came from fellow non-Muslim inmates and also from small groups of prison officers who were responsible for a considerable number of hidden and unreported provocations and, in particular, victimisation or instigation. Most of the attempts to vilify, offend and degrade Muslim prisoners focused on relatively sophisticated attacks against Islam or Muslim practices, including removing services or restricting access to them. Muhammad, a prisoner of Pakistani origin with more than 10 years of experience in both Cat A and B prisons, has observed,

I am a committed Muslim. I started being proper Muslim again when I was pad up. I was in prison when all the problems were just about the Paki thing, right? You were a Paki and that kind of bullshit racism that the English know how to do so well. I didn't feel so hurt – you just give the officer or the [fellow] prisoner an imaginary finger. It doesn't really touch you so much. Then I just focused on Islam and tried to be a good

prisoner and help others. Call me Paki, but leave Islam alone. Well, today it's all about Islam. I feel hurt, really. You know, I am a person, and here I have some rights. As a Muslim, I have now respect for my family and myself. They now attack what? Islam. I really feel upset; it makes me angry and upset. They know that, for Muslims, Islam and the Prophet are everything and so they offend Islam and even offend the Prophet here, and I feel really bad. It is the same outside [prison], have you seen? No respect for Islam at all.

Muslims in prison experience challenges to their feelings of dignity to which they have to react in order to maintain a sense of self. Often, the immediate response is anger, which can be expressed or, more often, kept inside and defused in a different way. As we have discussed, Islam often becomes an act of identity, or an act of faith, or even both simultaneously, so that the prisoner can, through it, avoid a personal breakdown. Many of my respondents, when asked about dignity, clearly linked it to some aspects of Islam, 'My dignity is Islam; for this reason if you offend Islam, you offend me here – and I will act, I have to.' Male Muslims in prison have also linked Islam to masculinity, where being male means to ardently defend one's dignity, 'Here if you let somebody step on you, you are done. For this reason, Muslims stick together and help each other. It's about being a man, being Muslim, you know? I mean a Muslim man must know how to behave.'

In the women's prisons, Muslims also confirmed the relevance of 'being treated as a human being'. Dignity, among the female Muslim prisoners I have interviewed and observed, had much to do with how the officer behaved and how they were treated by the establishment. Islam, thus, was the element through which they asked the establishment to respect them. In a certain sense, it helped to assert rules in a place, such as prison, which normally imposes rules, 'I am Muslim and they respect that and so they have to also respect some rules themselves. It is part of our human rights.' Dignity was very much linked, in the case of female prisoners to the idea of Human rights. This was very different, as we have seen, from the male perspective. Male Muslim prisoners had a more 'active' idea of dignity. Dignity is something that you have to achieve rather than request, as Tariq, a 38-year-old of Pakistani origin observed,

It is your behaviour. They will respect you if you have it [dignity] or if you know how to impose it. If you cry and scream for your rights, they will give you the silly form [the complaint form], which is trashed, and then they

respect you even less. Also the others will look at you as a weak person that just complains to the authority like a schoolboy to a teacher.

Muslims, as any other prisoners, have to adjust to prison rules and regulations, some of which, despite the attempt to maintain a sense of respect, may be perceived as an attack against one's dignity. Searches, of prisoners or their family members, are common and generally intended to detect drug smuggling. Sometimes dogs are used to check cells, inmates as well as visiting friends and relatives. Dogs, among some Muslim ethnic groups, largely Asians, are considered to be unclean and unpleasant within the practice of Islam, thus forcing, in the most moderate interpretation, the person who comes into contact with one to perform a full ablution (ghasul). Purity concerns, in this respect, extend not only to individuals but also to objects and physical space (i.e. cells). During my research, I have come across many Muslim prisoners' complaints pertaining to such issues. Some have focused on more serious problems where various prisoners have alleged that they suffered intentional discrimination that was aimed primarily towards Islam, or better their religious identity. In a Cat A prison, a 25-year-old Muslim convert claimed,

We are fully searched more often, I think, than others [i.e. non-Muslims], and they do so because they know that we are Muslims and we are not supposed to show our bodies or be touched by others; and what about women? There are female officers here, have you seen? Have you seen some of them? They should wear their uniform properly, no? Instead, well, go around and see by yourself. It is the same with dogs; they use them when there is no need. It is to humiliate us because we believe in Islam. It is unjust, but I do not expect justice here – nobody here really does.

Although some of the claims could not be verified, I have been informed that the Prison Services of Scotland, England and Wales were stepping up procedures to reduce, for instance, the use of dogs to check the relatives of Muslim prisoners, especially women and children. Yet the Prison Inspectorate's reports of different prisons and statistics provided by the English and Welsh Prison Services have confirmed a higher use of the segregation unit among prisoners of ethnic minority backgrounds,² and consequently full searches of Muslims. Other evidence of the factual basis of what was often presented to me as 'prison myths', such as full body searches of Muslim prisoners carried out in the presence of female officers, has been confirmed and, as we have seen, reported by the British mass media. In general, the

top levels of the prison management services pay great attention to these issues. However, policies are not applied uniformly and from prison to prison there can exist contradictions in practice, or even malpractice in particular establishments. Surely, there is great room for improvement and, as we shall see below, these improvements of environment and practice within prison can help to prevent the development of situations and realities conducive to the radicalisation of Muslim prisoners.

Nonetheless, the most relevant aspect in our analysis is not that there are clear loopholes in the Prison Services' regulations or problems of discrimination in certain prisons, but rather that these incidents are very often read through what I have called 'radical dualism'. Certainly what I have defined as the 'schismogenic circle of panic' (Marranci 2006, 2009) contributes to, and facilitates the spreading of, the idea that 'crusaders' are attacking Islam, not only as a religion but also, and foremost, as a 'way of life' and an identity. Some of the most affected prisoners can easily imagine prison as the 'battlefield' of such a confrontation because of the controlling environment within prison and the overpowering presence of government power, expressed through the idea of 'justice' and 'punishment' (Jones and Schmid 2000; Adams 1994; Sykes 1958). A prisoner of Arab origin, serving his third year of a lengthy sentence in a Cat A prison for grave crimes unrelated to terrorism, explicitly observed,

Today it is clear: on one side there is the crusader, on the other, the Muslims. You can see it in politics, the wars that the crusaders are fighting, the suffering of Muslim women and children. Here [prison] is no different. I would say that here we can experience this on our bodies and soul because they have power over us. They have the keys. They say that I am here because of justice, but what they do to Muslims here has nothing to do with punishing a crime. There is more – they see us as the enemy, and prison is like a battlefield.

The emotions provoked by the prison security routine, accidental degradation, or deliberate acts of discrimination, as we have seen, facilitate what I have called radical dualism, which easily becomes 'Islamic' because Muslim prisoners, as many ordinary Muslims, feel that the 'West' is rejecting and even fighting Islam and the Islamic way of life (Marranci 2009, 2007, 2008b, 2006). A Muslim prisoner, as any other prisoners,

may cope with jail by viewing himself as the victim of an ignominious criminal justice system . . . Rancour inspired by the system's intrusion into

one's life may escalate as a man computes the opportunity costs of his confinement. If such a man undermines the credibility of those who judge him, his self-image may be salvaged.

But this strategy has problems. For if incarceration is an overwhelming and irremediable loss of opportunity, the criminal justice system becomes an organization designed to capriciously interfere with the promise of life, and the world a place where the potential fruits of honest intentions are habitually withheld. (Toch 1975: 155–6)

I am not surprised that I have encountered among my respondents the same processes 33 years after Toch's study. Indeed, many of these 'coping systems' are not culturally based, but cognitive and rely on emotion and feelings, as we have observed in the previous chapter; hence, they are universal. Toch has described perfectly the kind of resentment that many Muslim prisoners whom I have met, observed and interviewed, experienced.

What is not universal, however, is the 'strategy' or the symbolic expression, dependent upon one's autobiographical-self and identity, through which these processes are expressed. There is a rejection, partial or total, of the imprisonment (when it is not justified, as we shall see, as God's mission), and a feeling that the world (particularly the West) itself is marked by 'ontological' injustice. As we shall see below, these elements were generally conceptualised through a religious rhetoric that went beyond traditional orthodox Islamic theology. In my study I have noticed that, though with varying intensities, the feeling of dignity, the idea of justice and Islam became often emphatically connected for my respondents. This connection occurred in such a way that actions which denigrate and delegitimize one's feeling of dignity provoked a need for a sense of 'real' justice which only Islam – or rather, their own way of seeing, living and 'feeling' Islam – could satisfy.

Prison, Islam and Justice

People have their own conceptualisation of 'justice' as both an idea and an ideal. Philosophers, judges, academics and politicians have often a more technical definition of what justice means within a particular social context. There is no human society that exists without some form and idea of justice, even though it may be expressed and conceptualised in astonishingly

different ways. Indeed, the moral and ethical values informing 'justice' as a concept can be derived from vastly disparate sources. Nonetheless, we may notice at least two major resources: the religious domain and the social, or 'secular', one.³ Certainly, we may ask whether 'justice' may be an 'artificial' or a 'natural' concept,

[I]n the Western tradition, the sense of justice has been viewed in a multitude of ways. Sometimes philosophic theory or religious doctrine teaches that justice is an absolutely binding or historically determined standard, sometimes it is viewed as a convention or custom based entirely on the way a human community 'names' some things as just and others unjust. But in some cases, as with Plato, the 'natural law' traditions of Grotius or Puffendorf, and Rousseau, the sense of justice is ultimately based on nature.

(Masters 1991: 299)

What is surely based on 'nature' is the fact that 'justice' provokes emotions, feelings and strong reactions. For example, imagine or call to mind some serious form of abuse you may have been unfortunate enough to suffer during your own life. As soon as the emotions (i.e. the change in the body state, such as heart rate and so on) start to emerge, provoking the experience of the feelings that derive from them, you are able to conceptualise that what you are feeling is your eagerness for something that you may name 'justice'. Probably after having suffered serious iniquity, for instance being blamed for something that you have not done and being imprisoned for it, you may exclaim, or even scream, the famous words: 'I want justice'.

That emotional processes can affect the conceptualisation of justice is certainly not a novel idea. Solomon has argued,⁴ 'emotions are essential to our sense of justice, and this includes such negative emotions as vengeance as well as such positive emotions as sympathy and compassion. [. . .] Understanding the emotions that go into our sense of justice, learning how these are cultivated and giving them new respect, rather than further developing the already voluminous arguments for and against this or that intellectual construction of justice, seems to be essential' (Solomon, R. 1989: 372); and definitely it is, as my fieldwork has demonstrated.

Toch (1975) has shown how prisoners, in the battle to maintain a stable self and avoid the consequences of a breakdown, tend to see themselves as victims of an unfair justice system that took control and interfered with their lives. There are, of course, many ways in which prisoners can react to this idea of 'injustice', but all are the product of what we have called

'emotions' and the subsequent feelings. Again, as part of the emotional process described above, dignity becomes an essential element of the idea of justice among Muslim prisoners who have experienced, or perceive to have experienced, discrimination and injustice. The more I discussed Islam with my respondents, the more I could appreciate how memories and the autobiographical-self have fostered the link between their identity and the 'idea of justice' as part of human dignity. Iqbal, a 20-year-old of Pakistani origin detained in a Scottish Cat B prison, surely felt that, despite having committed a crime (assault), he was the real 'victim' of an unfair system which is particularly so for Muslims,

I know why I am here. Okay, I have done wrong. But this is not justice. The other guy got away with nothing and he was worse than me for lots of things, right? But you see, if you are a Muslim today they give you more time than others. I live in a tough area and you have to defend yourself or you are done. So, it is like you or me, understand? I did not decide to live there and life should not be like this shit. It is the system; it is the system and if you are Muslim, you are done, you have no hope. Tell me, doc, what hope do we have? You have been there [place in Glasgow], and you have seen, right? So, do you think that it is just that I am here? It isn't in the first place, and look they even gave me more time than the others – why? Nobody really knows.

Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 491) have observed, 'forms of indignation may be regarded as emotional expressions of a meta-ethical anchorage, and concern infringements that are believed, at least implicitly, to affect people's possibilities of realizing their humanity.' Similarly, Solomon has also correctly noted, 'emotions ascribe responsibility, which is utterly essential to our sense of justice. We do not first ascribe responsibility and then respond emotionally. The emotion itself ascribes responsibility; it immediately recognizes (or simply presumes) that a harm or hurt has a cause. [. . .] Injustice, in other words, is not just getting the short end; it also requires that someone be to blame' (Solomon, R. 1990: 255). After September 11, references to 'Western civilisation' as a Judeo-Christian historical development have appeared in the speeches of some European, Australian and American politicians and commentators. Yet at the same time, western countries, and in particular Britain, advocate an understanding of religion as limited to the 'private' sphere. This is particularly true in the field of justice. Yet Muslim prisoners (and not just prisoners, Marranci 2009) can perceive this reference to a 'Judeo-Christian' value system and

the affirmation of a secular view of the state not only as contradictory but also as hypocritical. Yahya, a 24-year-old of Bangladeshi origin, and serving his fourth prison sentence for drugs, emphasised,

Is this a Christian country? Have you seen Friday night? Have you smelled the air? Yeah, there's alcohol and pot everywhere and it's even worse in the clubs. So, there are no values here other than the ones of money, sex and pleasure. This place has no values because values can come only from God, and this society rejects God's will. I think that what humans do without guidance from God can only be wrong. It is arrogance, right? You see, it is like here [prison] where you have people with the same identical crime – but they [parliament] have changed the law, so one day [the sentence] is X and the other Y.

You see what I mean. You have people here doing less years than others because they committed the crime before or after a law. But crime is crime, right? When justice is the justice of God, there is only one law and that cannot be changed. Also you do not have temptations everywhere, and people behave themselves so you do not end in prison – well, you end but only if you are a very very bad person. Not like me: I'm in prison because of bad friends, and one day taking it and the next a slave of the lady [heroin]. If drugs were not so easy and cool where I lived, I wouldn't have taken them and stolen to pay for them. I have been in prison too much; each time for a short time, but it has not helped me at all. This time is different, though. I am changing because I'm trying to be a real Muslim and, as the imam says, be the judge of myself and fully accept the law of God.

In one way or another, my Muslim respondents tend to see the 'West' as a monolithic a-moral entity that is responsible for their misfortune, crimes or unjust treatment. I use the term a-moral since the great majority of my respondents did not accuse the 'West' of immorality per se, but rather of lacking any real 'morality' and what we can call an 'ethos of justice', which according to them can only be derived from God's will.

Indeed, there is a tendency to see the juridical systems and customs of western countries as irredeemably marked by an adherence to human will that lacks universality and wisdom.⁵ Although my respondents varied in rejecting the secular juridical system, nobody declared to support a law that is based solely upon people's decisions. Outside prison, and even more within prison, many Muslims felt that they could only suffer injustice because the world around them was a-moral and a-just. As Toch (1975) has

highlighted, prisoners may reject their presence in prison as unjust in order to preserve their identity. A number of Muslim prisoners, to varying levels, do so through an Islamic ethos of justice framed more by personal, emotional, and consequently heterodox, Islam than orthodox teaching, the Qur'an and the Hadiths.

The Ultimate Freedom: Tawhid

'Who has more freedom between me and that officer?' asked Muhammad, an English Muslim convert aged 27. He waits for my reply. But, before I could answer he continued, 'I have freedom! He only thinks he has freedom because he goes home every night while I am here in my cell.' Intrigued, I asked him what kind of freedom he was speaking about. He answered with a simple sentence that I would come to hear again and again during my research (see also Marranci 2009), 'lā ilāha illā-llāh,⁶ this is my freedom. I am a slave of Allah. Nobody else can enslave me.' Other male Muslim prisoners expressed a similar reconceptualisation of what in Islamic theology is a central tenet; tawhid, the oneness of God. I have discussed elsewhere (Marranci 2009, but see also Wiktorowicz 2005; Sageman 2004) the centrality of tawhid in the discourse of extremist groups, however, here the main focus will be upon the discourse of power and empowerment that has derived from it. Of course, tawhid, as for all Muslims, is the essence of faith for any Muslim prisoner. Yet there are instances in which tawhid becomes part of the prisoners' rhetoric. On the one hand, for many for whom Islam is an act of faith, tawhid remains in that domain: a cornerstone of one's faith. On the other, for many for whom Islam is an act of identity, it easily may become an ideology (Marranci 2009). Not only does the ideology of tawhid, as any other ideology, provide worldviews, but it also presents instrumental strategies for changing the surrounding environment. In this sense the ideology of tawhid is, within the context of prison, a powerful tool.

As we have discussed, prison is based mainly on power and control relationships in which roles are clearly defined (Sykes 1958). The prison establishment imposes, and with force if needed, authority. Challenging the authority of the prison establishment through open violence is a bad and desperate strategy and very few prisoners, and even then only in clear particular circumstances, will resort to it (Adams 1992). Rather, prison authority can be defused and psychologically nullified by denying it as 'authority' and replacing it with a more powerful, irrepressible one. In doing so, some prisoners can feel that they are regaining their dignity, or

that they have the final word because they have the final truth. We have also to remember that prison is primarily a schismogenic environment in which the prisoners struggle to maintain an identity that makes sense of their autobiographical-self.

Hence, the ideology of tawhid allows some prisoners to 'free' themselves from the psychological authority of the prison establishment. At the same time, however, it increases the extreme dualism through which those prisoners perceive the prison, fellow prisoners (including Muslims) and the external world. Some may suggest that tawhid becomes an ideology for various prisoners because of their having been exposed to theological or radical views. Of my respondents whom adhered to an ideology of tawhid, the great majority had never read *ibn Taymiyah*⁷ or *Sayyid Qutb*.⁸ Indeed, some of them would have even had problems in understanding the technical word 'tawhid' in itself, let alone the complex theological discussions linked to it. Hence, how did they form such a powerful ideology, and why have others (the majority) not?

To explain this process we have to bear in mind the centrality of the feeling of dignity. It is true that Muslims in prison today face more challenges, coming from a variety of sources, to their own dignity. We have discussed above how dignity is linked to the perception of injustice, and consequently, the idea of justice. One of the most common strategies to avoid self-victimisation that I have found among Muslim prisoners is to reject 'human justice' as a-moral and lacking the ethos of divine justice. Many of these prisoners understood their life, before and after prison, as a long series of injustices due to the lack of God (i.e. morality) in society, and consequently in their own lives. As we have seen in the previous chapter, some have accused the 'godless' society of corrupting them and then viewed prison as Allah's attempt at bringing them back to the right path. Being Muslim means to fully submit to Allah's will, and in some cases, Muslim prisoners consider themselves Allah's slaves. Now extending this reasoning beyond the theological domain, some Muslim prisoners conclude that they have only one master, Allah, and they may thus reject any human authority, including that of the prison imam. The authority of prison establishment is based on human rules for the benefit of humans, and so, according to these Muslim prisoners, it is unavoidably marked by a-morality.

This religious mode, which is the result of the particularly schismogenic prison environment and emotional processes derived thereby, allows the most affected of the Muslim prisoners to consider themselves fully 'reformed'. Thus, they may deem themselves righteously superior to both the 'secular' institution of prison, non-Muslim prison staff and inmates, and also those fellow Muslims who do not accept, engage in, or develop such

view of Islam. However, I have noticed that it was not the most vulnerable of prisoners to adopt, and show the consequences of, an ideology of tawhid, but rather those who had their expectations of how they should be treated (especially in reference to their religious identity) most severely violated by the prison environment. Therefore, as we can expect, the majority of Muslims within, but also outside, prison, though respecting the theological idea of tawhid, do not extend it beyond personal faith and interpret their prison sentence as Allah working through 'human justice' to help them to 'follow the right path'.

The ideology of tawhid is not limited to the rejection of fellow humans as a source of authority but also includes the selective power of deciding who may be defined 'righteous'. As we have discussed, the ideology of tawhid is the product of extreme dualistic views where on one side there are 'the slaves of Allah' and on the other are the 'rebellious ones', or those (both Muslim and non-Muslim) who reject or are seen as not appreciating the logical consequences of respecting tawhid. In Chapter 5 of this book I have briefly discussed the hidden reality of Muslim-on-Muslim bullying. This bullying has its origins within the ideology of tawhid. We may not be surprised to discover that the ideology of tawhid facilitates the formation of some 'enclaves' among Muslim prisoners. Notwithstanding the process and the reasons for which the ideology of tawhid is developed, we have to emphasise that not all Muslim prisoners who adhere to it are political 'extremists' as may be understood by the mass media. Some of these Muslims use this ideology at a psychological level rather than a political one. Nonetheless, as we shall discuss in the next chapter, the ideology of tawhid may have a fundamental role in cases where former Muslim prisoners have become extremists or joined extreme Islamic groups.

The Imagistic Mode of Islam and Radicalisation

During my research within prison, I have observed how prison life is officially (through prison regulations) and unofficially (through prisoners' socialisation) 'ritualised'. Kaminski (2003: 188–9) has indeed observed,

Initiation rituals welcome newcomers to most human communities. Entering a total institution with a strong subculture can be especially traumatic. A newcomer may face trials of his acumen, tolerance for pain, self-confidence, alertness, physical strength, endurance, or sense of humor. After passing various tests, often humiliating or otherwise unpleasant, he is expected to learn local norms and customs quickly.

When he carelessly abuses a norm, a mild or harsh punishment teaches him the proper behavior. Finally, the group assigns him a label that ‘compresses the variegated range of [the group’s] experience into a manageable framework’ (Sykes 1958: 86). This learning process runs parallel to the training in the institution’s formal code and is tolerated, if not encouraged, by the personnel. The entire experience of rapid socialization to a new environment transforms a rookie [a new prisoner] into a fully adapted inmate.

In general, rituals can be categorised in two main ways: those based upon repetition and those based upon a one-off event, which is often traumatic. Surely, even for those who have served time in prison before, incarceration is a distressing event marked by several, more or less traumatic, rituals.

Has such ‘ritualisation’ impacted on how religion, in our case Islam, is understood? What we have discussed above confirms that some Muslim prisoners enter a process in which Islam as religion becomes not only part of their identity, through the process of emotions and feelings, but also part of their struggle to modify (at a psychological level) the highly schismogenic environment of prison by an act of identity.

In a majority of prisons that I have visited, governors and prison officers strongly believed that the radicalisation of Muslims happens mainly through extreme Islamic literature, sermons on smuggled cassettes, external indoctrination (such as through visitors or imams), and peer-to-peer education. After 9/11, any marginally controversial book, such as Qutb’s *Milestones*, was removed from prison libraries, and the introduction of Islamic literature was carefully monitored. Moreover, visits from relatives and friends of Muslim prisoners were often carefully monitored, reading preferences controlled, newspaper cuttings checked and recorded, letters scrutinised, and intelligence gathered about Muslim prisoners in general. I can say that today, it is probably easier to smuggle drugs or mobile phones into an English or Welsh prison than to introduce extremist literature (or what has been considered as such).

In some prisons I have visited, even stricter measures included a censorship policy regarding certain TV programs and channels, such as *Al-Jazeera*, because of the ‘critical tone’ employed in reporting international news from the Middle East, ‘controversial’ views on national politics or events, and the broadcasting of distressing footage from war zones. I can say that among the different categories of prisoners, Muslims were the more, officially but particularly unofficially, scrutinised when compared to others. Even prison imams, in their function of chaplains, restrained themselves from explaining certain words, such as jihad, reading certain verses from

the Qur'an that may sound controversial to untrained ears, and so forth. One prisoner, who wished to have some clarification about the concept of jihad, decided to ask the Church of England chaplain knowing that the imam was 'too scared to speak of it, even in general'. He then pointed out,

Imams fear to say everything or answer anything that is not in a book or photocopy that can be checked. In prison, the Islam of our imam is all about 'how': how to fast, how to read, how to pray, how to do ablutions. It is so different from Christianity. They discuss everything in their groups, even the war [Iraq]. I don't want to exaggerate, but even the word 'Iraq' if mentioned by a Muslim can bring you trouble. We have less freedom than others. We are watched continuously. I have been told that the [police] have a special branch and they put fake prisoners with you in the cell so that they can test you and your ideas. It's all truth, but they won't tell you, of course.

This prisoner was not as paranoid as he may seem at first glance. A retired prison officer informally confirmed that in some prisons there have been some 'intelligence operations', sometimes conducted by other agencies. Indeed, I was informed, and able to confirm with the prison authorities, that one inmate was held in the segregation unit while his cell was searched and then questioned because he had some 'suspicious' newspaper cuttings. The suspicious materials were ordinary articles and editorials (mainly from the *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Observer* and *Times*) criticising the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. The zealous security measures designed to seize anything that may even vaguely resemble 'radical' were so rigid that my book *Jihad beyond Islam*, despite being an academic publication, was unable to pass the gates of a Cat B prison (I suppose because of the word jihad!) despite being intended as a gift to the imam and governor there.

Is this passionate focus upon what we can call cultural objects, such as books, newspaper cuttings and imam's sermons, or extreme censorship and the induced fear of exchanging religious ideas effective in preventing extremism among Muslim prisoners? It is my contention that such general, stereotyped, security measures are not merely unsuccessful but rather they have a tendency to backfire. Of course, some material still infiltrates the high barbed-wire fences of prison, though it is certainly a minimal amount. Furthermore, as far as I could observe, these materials reach, and are of interest to, those inmates who already hold extreme, or even violent, views of Islam. It is important to remember here that much of the overtly radical discourse of Muslim prisoners, particularly within young offenders' institutions, is nothing other than bravado rhetoric. However, despite this, some

Muslims certainly radicalise while in prison,⁹ but it is not cultural objects that have the power to transform a young Pakistani drug addict, who never displayed interest in spirituality and politics, into, for instance, a fervent jihad supporter and potential 'mujahidin'. Rather it is the deepening of the processes we have discussed above and the formation of 'enclaves', removed from not only other prisoners but also the majority of Muslims, which provide the elements for the 'radicalisation'.

Among the main processes that differentiate Muslim prisoners adhering to strong dualistic views of Islam and the ideology of tawhid but who are not absorbed into the spiral of radicalisation and violent extremism, from those whom instead do, is a shift in the mode of religiosity (Whitehouse 2004). Whitehouse has explained religious transmission through a cognitive theory known as 'modes of religiosity'. The theory is quite complex, and Whitehouse has provided compelling evidence to support his model that we unfortunately have no space to discuss here. The main feature of the theory, however, is that religions are based on two contrasting modes of religiosity, the doctrinal and the imagistic modes.

According to Whitehouse, the two modes derive from how our memory works. Human beings have basically two forms of memories: one implicit and one explicit. The implicit memory is unconscious (such as, for example, the memory of all skills needed to ride a bicycle). The explicit memory, instead, is a conscious process that can be divided into two other kinds: short term and long term. Short-term memory is what one uses everyday to remember elements such as a telephone number, and which may or may not be retained within the long-term memory. Long-term memory, on the other hand, is what allows us to remember events from our past (Graf and Schacter 1985). Long-term memory is also subdivided into semantic and episodic memory,

Semantic memory consists of general knowledge about the world (e.g. how to behave in restaurants or what is the capital city of France). We can seldom recall how or when we acquired this sort of knowledge. By contrast, episodic memory consists of specific events in our life experience (e.g. our first kiss, the death of a beloved relative, and the day war broke out). These types of memory are activated somewhat differently in doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity. (Whitehouse 2004: 65)

Doctrinal modes of religiosity, such as the main monotheistic religions, are based upon repetitive rituals, structured around complex theological teachings, induce a low level of arousal and rely often upon scriptures or fixed

narratives. Religions derived from the doctrinal mode tend to have a diffuse social cohesion (e.g. not all Muslims, Christians or Hindus know each other); have a dynamic leadership; are inclusive; spread rapidly and on a large scale and are much organised. Finally, they tend to be highly uniform and centralised in their structures.

By contrast, religions based on an imagistic mode (e.g. some African tribal religions, or Cargo rituals in Papua New Guinea) have a low frequency of transmission; and a high level of arousal; are based on episodic memory; derive the meaning of rituals from personal, often traumatic experiences (e.g. initiations); social cohesion is intense; leadership less present; are exclusive; tend to have a small local scale; spread slowly and are not centralised (Whitehouse 2004: 74). Of course, some religions and movements may have a mix of the two, and not all the characteristics in the two lists may appear in any one given religion.

Whitehouse has suggested that fanaticism is the product of traumatic experiences similar to those of initiation rituals, so that fanaticism is the outcome of ‘a somewhat personal and private journey’ (2004: 124). From the discussion above and the previous chapters of this book, I believe that the reader has appreciated how entering prison may have similarities with certain tribal initiation rituals, and be similarly frightening, painful and shocking too. Both experiences facilitate in some cases, not only cognitive openings, but also spontaneous exegetical reflection (SER) in which the individual is able to extrapolate, as an effect of episodic memory, meaningful personal eschatology. Whitehouse has rightly emphasised, ‘remember that the traumatic ordeals of novices are not just experiences of coming under attack: they are experiences that carry meanings initially difficult to grasp but eventually blossoming into rather complex and highly motivating bodies of revelatory knowledge’ (2004: 126). We have observed throughout the chapters of this book how the experience of the prison environment and the psychological traumas therein have induced the majority of prisoners from a Muslim background to go through what we may describe as a reconversion to Islam. As we have seen, a considerable number arrive in prison having even forgotten how to perform Islamic rituals, such as prayers. Of course, my research has shown that they often rediscover Islam as an ‘insight’, even before being visited by an imam or starting to read the Qur’an or any other religious literature. As one prisoner pointed out,

I can say that I passed through the prison gates as a Muslim by name alone – but just after entering, I started to think about Islam and look for it in my heart, and find it. It was different from learning it, like when I was

a child. Here it was just like a ‘bang’ in your mind. How can I say? Like when you switch on the light in a dark room.

In some cases, this ‘insight’ process facilitates a shift from the most common (orthodox) doctrinal mode of Islamic religiosity to one (heterodox) derived from the imagistic mode.

Imams, including the prison imam, are used to operating within the ‘doctrinal mode’, and we can say that the Prison Service tends to sponsor an even more ‘orthodox’, controlled and structured version of Islam than that which exists outside prison. Certainly, the doctrinal mode of Islam has a certain appeal to those very few Muslim prisoners who used to fully practise Islam. Yet in the case of those Muslim prisoners who had limited exposure to the doctrinal mode of Islam and have thus ‘rediscovered’ Islam by ‘spontaneous exegetical reflection’, the doctrinal mode of Islam offered within prison has little, if any, appeal. Whitehouse has also suggested,

When we arrive at our deepest convictions through processes of direct, personal inference, they can shape and mold our attitudes and beliefs in a variety of ways. Low-frequency, high-arousal rituals promote intense cohesion, partly because of the sense people have of sharing a common stock of memories. But the people who survive these ordeals *also* generally assume their common experience gave them access to deeper meanings that are unavailable to those who haven’t similarly suffered. (2004: 135, emphasis in the original)

As we have discussed above, some Muslim prisoners form enclaves. Their experience of Islam is the result of an imagistic mode of religiosity where the ideology of tawhid becomes the key to an understanding of Islam that is different to more orthodox approaches. In fact, tawhid in ‘orthodox’ Islamic thought, although a central theological concept, is not understood as a tool to completely reject human authority. Any prison imam would support the precept that prisoners must respect prison officers and rules, and that this respect is part of being, or learning to be, good Muslims. Furthermore, as an imam, in a Cat B prison with a high number of Muslim prisoners, reminded his audience in a Friday sermon that I attended,

There are two kinds of sins: those against Allah and those against other people and the rest of creation. If you repent, Allah will show you forgiveness. But in the case of evil actions against other people, you have to receive forgiveness from the victim, the victim’s family, or pay back society so that Allah can then grant you forgiveness. You are here today, in this

prison, to pay for your sins against society. Prison is an occasion for you to change and receive forgiveness from God.

It did not come as a surprise that some Muslim prisoners disagreed with some of the imam's words, which actually reinforced in their eyes that he was 'not a servant of God but of the prison'.

This group of prisoners understood their presence in prison in quite different terms. Yes, they were in prison and this was because Allah wanted it. Through the traumatic experience of prison, they had reached a deep understanding of Islam as absolute tawhid. They now, by means of their personal experience of Islam, can understand that they ended in prison because of the lack of divine justice in society and that they are in prison to discover what Allah wanted from them. Prison, in other words, is instrumental to their 'revelation' that the only authority is God, and it also becomes a school to train them to accept only tawhid and fight all temptations. It is not difficult to see how their heterodox theology is the result of spontaneous exegetical reflection. The shift from the doctrinal mode of religiosity of their teenage years to the prison provoked imagistic mode is the ultimate reason for their radicalisation and not cultural material, such as radical literature or sermons, which in case are the tools to maintain and justify the spontaneous exegetical reflection. In other words, the few attempts to smuggle extreme Islamic material within prison is a secondary, and not a primary, cause of Islamic extremism in prison.

The harsh conditions for Muslim prisoners that we have described in Chapter 4 and the often overzealous surveillance, as well as a lack of possibility to discuss 'controversial' topics even within the institutionalised provision of Islam inside prison, facilitate the imagistic mode of Islamic religiosity and the spreading of spontaneous exegetical reflection, which undermines the work of professional prison imams. Besides, the excessively structured, over controlled¹⁰, strictly defined and repetitive version of Islam produces what Whitehouse has defined the 'tedium effect' (2002). As a result of the factors inducing this effect, the imagistic mode of Islamic religiosity may appear to a growing number of Muslim prisoners to be more convincing and psychologically, as well as cognitively, attractive than the official version of Islam.

Conclusions

How do Muslim prisoners form their religiosity? How can Muslims who did not practise Islam outside prison immediately start to show a high level

of religiosity after incarceration? Why does Islamic radicalism exist in prison? Why do some Muslim prisoners radicalise while others do not? In this chapter, I have tried to provide an answer to these and other questions. As in the rest of this book, I refrain from providing a simple model in which the 'prison culture', 'Islamic culture' or 'material culture' shapes Muslim prisoners' behaviour and understanding of prison, and rather suggested that we must pay attention to the dynamics that exist between the prison environment, emotions and the prisoners' sense of dignity.

I have discussed the centrality of the idea of justice and dignity in the formation of Muslim religiosity and the consequences of overreaching formal and informal security policies. Indeed, we have observed that there is often an incongruity between the Muslim prisoners' expectations of how they should be treated and the actual reality. In some cases these expectations are deeply frustrated and thus exacerbate the idea that the prisoner is suffering an injustice. We have also observed how in these cases some Muslim prisoners, through the common experience of radical dualistic views, engage in what Whitehouse has called spontaneous exegetical reflection and form a heterodox understanding of tawhid, the main pillar of Islam. Despite the existence of what I have referred to as the ideology of tawhid, very few Muslim prisoners become extremist or fanatical. The reason for which some actually do may be explained as the passage between two different modes of religiosity (Whitehouse 2004): the most common, in the case of orthodox Islam, doctrinal mode of Islamic religiosity to the uncommon, and resulting from specific prison traumas, imagistic mode. As we will discuss in the next chapter, those Muslim prisoners who have rediscovered Islam through a spontaneous exegetical reflection, resulting in an imagistic mode of religiosity, are more at risk of being exploited by extremist groups or individuals once they are released from prison. The fact that the efforts to minimise the risk of radicalisation stop at the gates of the prison, leaving often vulnerable former Muslim prisoners without support or supervision, can only increase such a risk.

Notes

¹ It is vital to stress here that the process of radicalisation does not only apply to Muslims, or their understanding of Islam, but also to other prisoners adhering to other religions, political philosophies, football teams or worldviews.

² Race Review 2008, Ministry of Justice, p. 179, www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease161208a

- ³ It is interesting to highlight that, in reality, we only find combinations of the two that differ only in the amount of weight which is given to one at the expense of the other.
- ⁴ It should be noted that here Solomon uses the term ‘emotions’ as it is conventionally used in everyday language, so that Damasio’s distinction between emotions and feelings can be recognised but not from the terminology other authors may use. Hence, if vengeance is an emotion, sympathy and compassion are feelings. I expect that the reader at this stage may recognise, despite the terminology used by the different authors, the distinction between the two.
- ⁵ I have to emphasise that this idea of the ‘West’ as lacking real morality and consequently real justice is not limited to those within prisons. It is actually considerably widespread, especially after 9/11 and the War on Terror. The idea that western civilisation is a-moral, rather than simply immoral, can be often appreciated not only when Muslims comment upon justice or politics, but also in discussions of ordinary everyday aspects of the ‘West’ – such as family life, women’s dress styles and so forth (for more see Marranci 2009 and 2007).
- ⁶ There is no God other than Allah. This is the first part of the Muslim declaration of faith or shahadah. Yet, the shahadah also has a second part that states that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah – a part that interestingly is missing here.
- ⁷ Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyah (1263–1328) Islamic Sunni Scholar from the Hanbali school of thought. Some scholars have suggested that his theological and political ideas have inspired some fundamentalist and radical groups. For more on Taymiyah you can read Al-Matroudi 2006.
- ⁸ Sayyid Qutb, born in 1906, has often been designated as the ideologue of the most radical trends of Islamic fundamentalism. Former member of the Egyptian *Ikhwaan* (Muslim Brotherhood) and author of *Milestones*, he was sentenced to death for allegedly being one of the conspirators in the assassination of Sadat and hanged in 1966.
- ⁹ It is of paramount importance to emphasise that prison does not radicalise only Muslims but also other prisoners. Depending upon the autobiographical-self of the prisoner, the prison experience and the schismogenic events and environment in which the prisoner is involved, the ‘radicalisation’ that can be observed is of different kinds involving various aspects, such as football, politics, religion, sexuality and so forth.
- ¹⁰ Some imams, for fear of being accused of ‘radicalising’ Muslim prisoners, prefer to read sermons from purposely written books and avoid any topic related to current political events or religious controversy. Often, the sermons as well as the teachings are extremely repetitive and similar from one year to the next, with an over focus on instructions and practice of, for instance, prayers.

Chapter 7

From Caged Bodies to Caged Souls: The Dystopian Experience of Leaving Prison

We have discussed in the previous chapter how prison can shape prisoners' religiosity. The gates of prison, other than in extremely few cases, will one day open and prisoners must readapt to life within mainstream society. Normally, release from prison comes with some conditions that the prisoner has to respect as part of his reintegration. Parole is a safeguard to help former prisoners readapt and rebuild their lives, and also a way of monitoring their progress and preventing reoffending (Robinson 1999). There is no prisoner who has not imagined the day of his/her release with trepidation. Prison life provides not exactly security – we have seen that violence, even of a sexual nature, is not uncommon in some cases – but there are some aspects, such as predictability, formal and informal rules, roles, friendships and in-groups that the prisoners become used to, especially those with medium and long-term sentences. Unpredictability, by contrast, marks everyday life outside prison. Some prisoners may even question their relationship with their family, spouses and even children.¹ However, if we have studies – and we have discussed some of them – about life inside prison, much less has been written and studied about life after prison.² Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, no studies about former Muslim prisoners have been published to date.

In this chapter, starting from some of my respondents' experiences and after-prison life stories, I will discuss the challenges that, as former prisoners and Muslims, they face both within the mainstream society and their religious community. Despite that many are ultimately successful stories of rehabilitation, a majority of experiences are marked by rejection, a lack of community support and mistakes in probation. This, as we shall examine below, facilitates the risk that some former Muslim prisoners may recommit crimes or, more rarely and in specific circumstances, are exploited by radical groups or individuals.

Iqbal: One of Many

I met Iqbal in a Scottish prison. He was happy that particular day because he was expecting to leave his cell for good the day after. Iqbal was 24 years old, and the third child of a Pakistani family that migrated in the 1970s from the Faisalabad district in Punjab to Scotland. Iqbal, as two of his siblings, was born in Scotland, while his sister and other two brothers were born in Pakistan and married there recently. Iqbal's father was employed in a telephone and IT shop, and Iqbal sometimes helped there. However, most of the time, he wandered the streets with friends and it was not long before he started to commit small crimes with them.³ Iqbal soon started drinking and patronising both pubs and prostitutes. His relationship with his family, and particularly his father who was a committed Muslim, soon deteriorated. Before long, Iqbal left his family home and lived with various friends. He was not interested in religion and considered many of his family's traditions to be mere superstitions. He conducted what his friends described as a 'very westernised life'. Aged 19, he was imprisoned for a few months after a fight, and was soon thereafter arrested again following a drunken brawl in which he punched and stabbed his opponent. Iqbal's adversary ended in hospital while Iqbal again ended in prison. Sentenced to 3 years for 'assault to severe injury', he rediscovered Islam during his prison term. I first met him a few months before his release on probation, and then again the day before he was to leave his cell.

He was surely excited but also very anxious about his future. In prison, he had difficulties trying to tackle his addictions, planning his future and attempting to rebuild his relationship with his family. Although in the beginning his family had rejected him, after Iqbal's imprisonment and a letter in which he explained to his parents how he had reconnected with his faith, things progressed and he started to receive regular visits from his younger brother, uncle and father. He only spoke to his mother by phone as her experience of visiting him in prison had been too traumatic for another attempt. She had difficulty seeing her son as a prisoner and the security procedures she had to go through to visit him intimidated her. He had not seen his mother for more than 3 years, and he was very apprehensive and emotional about it.

I visited him again before his release on probation since we had agreed that I would follow his experience of reintegrating into society. I had met his parents and knew that his father had decided to travel to Pakistan to take care of a family-related issue involving Iqbal's younger brothers. His parents were very happy about my presence; they hoped that this might help Iqbal to stay out of trouble. I tried to explain that I could not do

anything much, but I was happy to help as much as I could. I was invited to stay with the family so that I could observe Iqbal's progress and challenges. I was to stay in his younger brother's room. I met Iqbal again two weeks after he had left prison, as agreed. Of course, as I did not want to abuse his family's hospitality and also as I had to continue my research, I limited my initial stay to one week but continued to visit Iqbal and spend occasional weekends at his home.

Iqbal was on probation and the probation officer tried to help him find a job. The fact that Iqbal could stay with his family was very important, since those who are rejected by their families have less chance of completing their probation and face more challenges and higher risks of reoffending. However, as I soon discovered, there was the other side of the coin: Iqbal found himself in the same environment and context that facilitated his criminal offences and addictions in the first place. Physically following Iqbal allowed me to appreciate the peer pressure and temptation that he had to overcome in order to respect his probation restrictions. Even walking from his house to the local mosque (i.e. prayer room) involved passing streets where his 'friends' hanged around.

Iqbal had marked his renewed commitment to his faith by dressing in a recognisably South Asian religious style, growing a beard and removing his moustache. During his sentence in prison he had come into contact with the Tablighi Jama'at⁴ that was now offering him some support. Indeed, his relationship with the local prayer room, and even the more established mosques, was not easy. As I could appreciate just by attending the jummah prayer with him, he was not particularly welcome and he was never offered any support. When he approached one of the local imams to explain his situation, the response was, although polite, clearly aimed to minimise Iqbal's presence within the prayer room, despite his intention to volunteer for the community.

This rejection was particularly painful and emotionally distressful for Iqbal. At the same time, his previous friends did not accept his new appearance and commitment to Islam. They called him 'Sheikh' in the street and suggested that he had lost his mind in prison, though they would still tempt him and try to get him back in the gang. Iqbal did not find a job, and he gradually became very depressed about his situation. Increasingly, he found support among some of his contacts within the Tablighi Jama'at and developed a desire to leave his city and possibly Scotland. Changing week by week, his mood and ideas, affected by the rejection of his renewed Muslim identity, darkened. For the first time, he displayed an interest in politics and it was clear that some people had a great influence on him. Iqbal was

trapped between leaving his new strong religious identity to resume his previous lifestyle and finding refuge among the few who accepted him, but whose interpretation of Islam was reinforcing those dualistic world-views that he had developed in prison.

Iqbal lacked support and proper understanding of the difficulties he had to face. The probation programme seemed not to help him, and it was furthermore keeping him in Scotland when he hoped to restart a new life elsewhere helping young Muslims to avoid his own previous mistakes. The probation officer, who was a White British non-Muslim, had no idea of the specific problems that Iqbal was facing as a Muslim ex-prisoner. Iqbal was thus left feeling frustrated and disillusioned with the probation programme, the mainstream Muslim community and his former friends. Isolation, alienation and a constant sense of injustice forced Iqbal to become increasingly remote and extremely selective about his friends (who were mainly reduced to some members of Tablighi Jama'at) and social interaction. In a certain sense, Iqbal was recreating a prison around himself in which he was both the prisoner and the incarcerator at the same time.

Iqbal had developed a dependency upon, and fully trusted, a small group of 'brothers' associated to the Tablighi Jama'at. Nonetheless, he was fortunate that this group, despite essentialist political and social views, did not advocate violent actions. Yet as we shall discuss in this chapter, some other former prisoners had different experiences: some succeeded in leading law abiding lives, a considerable number reoffended and a small, but significant, number faced the exploitation of their prison-inspired religiosity by radical groups or, more often, criminal organisations and gangs. Although I have followed and interviewed many former Muslim prisoners, the unique access to Iqbal's life after prison suggested that former Muslim prisoners receive less support than non-Muslims, particularly regarding reintegration within their own community.

Family, Friends and Mosques

Leaving prison can be as traumatic as entering it (Jones and Schmid 2000). This is particularly true in the case of those who serve lengthy sentences. My interviews have demonstrated that prisoners, even when in the initial stages of their sentence, think about the difficulties they may face upon release. As expectations and hopes increase towards the end of one's sentence, so too does anxiety. As one of the Muslim prisoners at the end of his sentence described,

When you enter prison, you have to detach yourself from your previous life. You have visits from family and friends, but they are short. You are also taken care of, so to say. You change here, but also things change outside, and they change faster than you do. So you don't know what to expect and you start to imagine a lot. After years here, after learning how to be Muslim in prison and after you have a kind of community, you don't know how people outside might react to you. You start to plan your life – you think about family, about work, about how you will keep out of trouble. I think that only Islam can keep me out of trouble this time, otherwise I'd be back here soon.

The expectations are no less strong. All Muslim prisoners whom I have spoken to emphasised how they believed that their Muslim identity and their commitment to Islam were the best protections against the risk of seeing the prison bars again.

Religion also plays an important role among those Muslim prisoners who hope that their families and loved ones will accept them back into their lives and homes. Family visits are essential to rehabilitation in general because they help the prisoner to maintain and assess relationships which otherwise can only be 'imagined'. A considerable number of Muslim prisoners are also parents, and contact with their children is an essential part of their attempt to change. Religion has a relevant role in this process since some prisoners, particularly women, feel that due to their renewed faith in Islam they may finally fulfil their parental role properly and provide their children with the moral values that they felt themselves to have previously lacked,

I know that in a few weeks I can live with my child. She needs her Mummy more than ever. When I entered prison, she was just one year old. Now she is a little lady, she is three. I missed her terribly here, but I was not a good mother before. Now I have my faith and I know that I have responsibilities, but I have also Allah to help me. I want to give my daughter what I did not have. I really changed thanks to Islam. I think that I will need help, but I know that brothers and sisters help each other because we are Muslims. (25-year-old Black African Muslim woman)

Prisoners often have great expectations that not only their family, but also the 'Muslim ummah' would support them.

Although the majority of Muslim prisoners whom I have interviewed received visits from some friends and relatives, the prisoners who had served

longer sentences (more than 3 years) were the most optimistic about receiving some kind of support from their families – and fortunately their expectations often matched reality. In their case, the long period of time spent in prison had helped the family to come to terms with the criminal act of the offender and it also provided them with stronger evidence that the rediscovered faith had a real impact upon the prisoner,

I have committed a terrible crime, as you know. I have shamed my family, and they have been very upset with me for a long time. Yet I continued to write letters to my older sister, and she has been really good to me. She has so happy when I told her that I wanted to be a good Muslim. She is very religious herself. Because of the time that I had to spend here [in prison], they [relatives] had time to see how I was changing and how I have overcome my serious problems. It took time, but, thanks to my sister's mediation, my parents came to visit me and talked to me again. It is like I am born again. I now know that I won't need to end in a hostel when I leave this place. I can go back home and restart my life as a real Muslim.

Not all Muslim prisoners are so fortunate. Some are rejected by their families and are unable to rebuild a trusting relationship with them. At the time of being released, they have to be accommodated in a special hostel. It is unsurprising that in these cases the prisoners either tried to rebuild links with the individuals who were conducive to the offending behaviour that led to their previous sentence or, as we shall discuss later, ended up developing links with some radical individuals who were ready to exploit the isolation and lack of family support.

Sometimes, especially for first generation parents who have migrated relatively recently to the United Kingdom, the shock of the arrest and prison detention of, for example, a son is so great that the father may decide to return, with the rest of the family, back to their country of origin in order to protect the other offspring. Indeed, some immigrant Muslim parents blame British culture for having affected their children and corrupted them (see also Wardak 2000; Marranci 2007, 2008a). As Mustapha, a Pakistani father of four who has lived in the United Kingdom since 1992, explains,

I have my responsibility if Nusaridin is in a young offender's institution. I should not have come back here. Look, my other kids who were educated in Pakistan when they were young – they are hard working, respectful children. This country [the United Kingdom] has ruined both

Nusaridin's life and mine. We are respectable people, I have a respectable job and I speak English, I am educated and wanted to provide my children with education. I know . . . the police officer was very nice to us and told us that even good English families, even the families of police officers, sometimes have some children in prison. It can happen: it is something more common here and that we could have done little for him. But there was one thing that I could have done. I could have left this country to go back to Pakistan! He was born here, and this is the result of many temptations that he could not resist. His sisters and brothers are so affected by this – by seeing him there. We want to go back to Pakistan when he leaves prison. There is no future for him here and there is no future for us now. I am full of shame [he cries].

While Mustapha was planning to bring back his family, together with his troubled son, to Pakistan, Sahib, a former prisoner who had spent 5 years in prison, had a very different experience of the 'return to Pakistan'. His parents believed that their son Sahib was the type of child all parents would want to have. He gave them gifts and took care of them and his brothers. His parents presumed Sahib had a nice job, although they never asked in detail precisely what he was doing. They trusted their strong, handsome son. In reality, aged 20, Sahib was part of a gang dealing in drugs and prostitution. He had a beautiful powerful car, trendy clothes and he donated money to the mosque. He was quite popular and nobody questioned the source of his unusual wealth. Some within the community, as Sahib would many years later tell me, may have had some doubts and suspicions, but they preferred to close their eyes instead of trying to rescue him. Indeed, he was not looking for help, 'I just lived for the easy money, the car and the women. I was addicted to wealth, sex and my image of being a successful young Pakistani man. I wanted to be loved and admired!'

Sahib's criminal life went unchallenged until the day he was arrested at first for possession of firearms and then charged also for prostitution and drug-related crimes. The news of his arrest was a trauma for his family, who however stuck by him as they believed that possessing a firearm was the worst crime he had committed. Yet, as Sahib explained,

It did not take long for them to know the truth, and to know from where the money came from – drugs and prostitution. These were crimes of severe shame for a very Muslim family like mine. My father knew that this would have consequences back in Pakistan. I had dragged down the izzat [honour] of my family, especially because I donated money to the mosque

that came from very haram [forbidden] activities. I was foolish at that time. I didn't care about religion. I only wanted to be seen as an important person. My family was ashamed and I became *bisharam adami* [a shameless person] for them. This means that I was cut off from the community and my biraderi. I was really left to myself.

Nobody came to visit me, other than a few friends and one girlfriend. I was arrogant even in prison – going on trying to do business [smuggling drugs within the prison] and so ending worse and worse, and even having more years added to my sentence. One day I received a letter from Pakistan. All my family were back! I was really left alone. I decided to change and Islam helped me, as you can see. But when I left prison, I really had nobody because I did not want to see the old guys. I am now in contact with my mother by letters and phone, but, though many years have passed, my father still does not want to speak to me. Inshallah, things will change after the Hajj I am going to do this year.

Family support is often the central element to a successful parole period and reintegration (Maruna and Immarigeon 2004; Corden et al. 1978) and although family remains the main point of reference for the majority of former Muslim prisoners, other institutions are also expected to provide support.

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, the great majority of Muslim prisoners entered prison knowing little about Islam and sometimes lacking in even basic knowledge of its practice (Beckford et al. 2005). Prison has reintroduced them to Islam and, as we have seen, Islam in prison has many varieties, from the official one provided through the prison imam to what we have called the imagistic Islamic mode of religiosity. The mosque, for many, becomes the symbol of the Muslim ummah (Marranci 2008b). Some prisoners, especially those who have little contact with their families, expect that some support may come from mosques and Islamic institutions. Indeed, during their prison sentence they became familiar with the activities of mosques due to publications provided by associations interested in the welfare of Muslim prisoners. With the exception of few prison imams, the majority do not prepare the prisoners with the fact that mosques, Islamic institutions and general Muslim congregations outside prison usually do not welcome Muslim former prisoners, that they do not provide support outside prison and that they are badly organised to provide even preliminary assistance or advice to them (Knott and Francis 2004).

Recently some pilot projects have been activated in order to provide a link between the Prison Service, probation officers and some religious organisations. One of these projects that I became familiar with is the Community Chaplaincy Project (CCP), which is based in Leeds. The intention of this project is to provide pastoral care to prisoners not only during their sentence but also afterwards. Not only does this uninterrupted pastoral care facilitate the reintegration of Muslim former prisoners within the community, and often the family, but it also avoids the isolation and alienation that prisoners may experience if there is a lack in support received. Finally, all the elements above and the care of the prison imam, who knows the prisoner and his or her difficulties, can help to avoid that radical organisations or individuals may exploit the former prisoners.

Sometimes, however, problems may arise even when the family of a Muslim former prisoner accepts him or her back into the fold. After years of imprisonment (or sometimes even months) the family meet a different person from the child, sibling or grandchild that they knew before. The change can be positive, especially with respect to the often reinforced commitment to Islam. Yet, as we have discussed, in prison the newfound religiosity may develop into heterodox interpretations of Islam affected, generally, by a radical dualism and imagistic expression. The new Islamic identity may surprise, or even worry, the family or increase tension among its members. One father, whose son had left the family after staying with them in the initial months after his release, observed,

I was happy when I met him in prison and saw that he had changed. We are good Muslims but we're moderate. I mean, we respect Islam and our Bangladeshi traditions. There is no contradiction in that. Well, I noticed that he had changed his style while in prison, I mean, he was more Islamic – he had grown a beard and wore a cap. I felt that he wanted to show that he had changed. You go to the visits, but you do not have much time to speak. The day he came back, I was so happy. But it did not take very long to understand that our son was really different, and his Islam was as well. He rejected our traditions and he criticised us for everything: he said that we live in superstitions and we have to learn from him to be real Muslims. I was very upset: I am his father and he was also very arrogant to his mother. He wanted us to relearn Islam.

He became more and more political when watching news or reading newspapers. I did not want to hear what he said about this [United Kingdom] country and the people here. I do not like war but it is not the fault of ordinary people. I mean he was all against everything, and he

called me a coward because I was not ready to agree with him and his radical views. We had bad arguments, and one day he left. I can only pray for him and hope that he will find the right way.

During my research I have observed the high level of resources that the Prison Services, especially in England, invest in ‘controlling’ extremism in prison. Some of these efforts have backfired and rather increased the chance that, in certain prisons, prisoners may form an imagistic mode of Islamic religiosity rather than a doctrinal one. These efforts to prevent radicalisation among Muslim prisoners stop at the gates of the prison. The probation services seemed little prepared to face the specific problems of those Muslim former prisoners who ended in the cycle of radical dualism and emotional Islam. The task of probation officers is to reintroduce prisoners back into society and limit the risk that they will recommit crime. Yet no particular effort is made to help prisoners to reintegrate within their ethnic, or religious, community (Calverley et al. 2004).

As I have emphasised in Chapter 2 of this book, integration can only be a local experience and locality marks the lives of people. For this reason, working with the Muslim former prisoners’ ethnic and religious community of origin is essential. Indeed, during my research, some of the Asian rioters, imprisoned after being involved in the July 2001 riots in Bradford, started to be released. A multi-agency group called the ‘re-integration of offenders group’ was formed and tried to find the most efficient ways of successfully resettling them back into society (see Briggs 2005). Among the most important actions undertaken to increase the chances of successful reintegration has been the work done with the families and communities of the former prisoners.

Unfortunately, this has been only a pilot project and still the majority of Muslim former prisoners leave prison with virtually no probation (if the sentence is less than 1 year), inadequate probation (because of not being specific to their issues and realities), and isolated from mosques and the mainstream Muslim community. It does not help that many Muslims in the United Kingdom have stereotyped views of prison, such as prison is where bad Muslims end; prison is not rehabilitation but punishment, so that prisoners come out worse than they were before they went in; and prison is a place that makes people homosexual so that former prisoners are possible homosexuals or have a deviant sexuality. As we can understand, these stereotypes do not help the former Muslim prisoners to reintegrate, especially when their experience of leaving prison and entering society is often marked by fear and anxiety.

Faith, Fear and Utopias

We have discussed the disorienting experience of entering prison in Chapter 4, and in Chapters 5 and 6 how that experience, and the physical and psychological environment of prison, has affected the religiosity of Muslim prisoners. One of the main emotions (understood in Damasio's terms) implicated in the described process was 'fear', experienced through the associated feelings deriving from it. Fear, however, has as much of a role in the experience of leaving prison as it does in the ordeal of entering it. Although induced by various elements, fear thus remains central to how prisoners, who are about to become former prisoners, conceptualise the world and their future. The prison environment is a controlled and predictable one in which prisoners can easily foresee the behaviour of those around them (Hasaballa 2001; Bondeson 1989). In the outside world, however, unpredictability reigns. This is a stark reality, as we have seen above, for former prisoners: 'Life is painful in prison, but it is still easier than outside. You are on your own when out: you do not have a group, you have to make decisions by yourself, and you must have your own rules', observed one of my informants. A prisoner's main fears before leaving prison are usually failure and the risk of going back to prison, lack of employability and isolation after others discover their past convictions (Briggs 2005; Maruna and Immarigeon 2004; Knott and Francis 2004). In other words, prisoners fear 'judgement'.

In the previous chapter, I have shed light on the centrality of the feeling of dignity and ethos of justice to many of my respondents' religious identities, and the far-reaching consequences that radical dualistic viewpoints have within the context of prison. The fear of social 'judgement' and the former prisoners' expectations that they may face more unjust treatment and social discrimination because of their imprisonment tends to reinforce the idea that, despite the committed crimes, they are paying too high a price to a society which they consider responsible for their misconduct in the first instance. I have observed different degrees of resentment towards society, but this resentment tends to have a proportional relationship to both the fear of unjust treatment and the idea that one has already suffered injustice.

I have also observed that stronger resentment exists among those prisoners who have received short to medium sentences but risk to lose, through social ostracism, much more than the few months or years of freedom that prison has imposed upon them. Indeed, lifers imprisoned for a far longer period of time are able to accept and make sense of the total disruption of

their pre-incarceration life. Lifers often consider their release from prison to be a 'new beginning and new lease of life', as one of them explained, 'There is no bitterness. Rather, only the wish to use all the resources available to start again towards the right direction.' Lifers, however, generally receive much more support than short-term prisoners.

Although my respondents have shown similar patterns to any other prisoners nearing the end of their sentences, I have noticed among the most religious a surprisingly optimistic view of their future post-prison life. As we have discussed in Chapter 6, within prison we can distinguish three main forms of Islamic religiosity. These three forms consist of one which is mainly instrumental and resulting from the need to be part of the group; another which represents a majority of Muslim prisoners that, although affected by radical dualism, is still based on a traditional doctrinal mode; and finally, an emotional Islam based upon an imagistic mode of religiosity (Whitehouse 2004) and often marked by the formation of 'prison enclaves'. The Muslims who have used Islam as merely a strategic tool of survival, rather than as an act of faith or identity, have shown little optimism about their future and even suggested, during interviews, that they are likely to recommit offences and perhaps return to prison. These prisoners seemed to be very passive and, although claiming to be Muslim, felt that they would fall short of Islamic requirements once outside prison. Islam helped them to be part of a group within prison, but outside, they explained, others would not consider them Muslim and they planned not to attend mosques.

By contrast, I have observed among the Muslims who have developed the other two forms of religiosity⁵ evidence of what we may call 'utopianism' about their future lives as former prisoners. While those adhering to a doctrinal mode of Islamic religiosity expected that the Muslim ummah, and not just their local community, would accept them, those affected by an imagistic mode saw themselves as possessing an 'ultimate truth' which had possibility to change the Muslim ummah. In both the cases, they saw the experience of prison as serving a positive purpose and the release from prison as a new beginning. But both, after being released, often face disillusion and dystopia.

Indeed, many of those who presume that the 'Muslim ummah' would be ready to recognise their change, and perhaps even support them in this rediscovered path of religiosity, have to face rejection and perhaps also, as we have discussed above, ridicule from pre-incarceration friends. Some mosques may even openly reject the former prisoner or, more often, isolate him. Also, because of the radical dualism developed during the time spent in prison, some of these Muslim former prisoners have serious problems

readapting to the syncretic, when not heterodox, Islamic traditions of their families or communities (e.g. rejection of the celebrations of the Prophet Mohammed's birth, visiting the graves of saints and so forth). Indeed, even those who have developed a Muslim identity within the doctrinal mode of Islamic religiosity have an understanding of Islam that tends to be rigid, formal and heavily focused on practices marked by their experience of re-learning their religion within the controlled and standardised environment of prison.

However, those Muslims who have rejected the official version of Islam provided by the Prison Service, and have instead been absorbed within an imagistic mode of religiosity, experience disillusionment and dystopia in a different way. Of course, because of their imagistic experience of Islam, these Muslims would not perceive the mosque or the mainstream Muslim community as an option for maintaining or reinforcing their Muslim identity. On the contrary, they would generally reject the mainstream, official mosques, and rather prefer membership to fringe organisations and groups, perhaps even attempting to form their own. Indeed, after a while, the awareness that a majority of Muslims may perceive their views of Islam as 'strange' or even, in some circumstances, 'fanatical', is likely to provoke in them a strong disillusionment with the state of the ummah and a dystopian view of the western society that they are part of (Marranci 2006, 2009).

In conclusion, some of those Muslim prisoners, for whom the experience of prison had an overwhelming impact on their rediscovery of Islam and deeply affected how they 'feel to be Muslims' have then, particularly after being released, developed a kind of utopian thinking. Mannheim has acutely observed,

The concept of utopian thinking reflects the discovery of the political struggle that certain oppressed groups are intellectually so strongly interested in the destruction and transformation of a given condition that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation which tend to negate it. [. . .] In the utopian mentality the collective unconscious guided by wishful representation and the will to action, hides certain aspects of reality. It turns its back on everything which would shake its belief or paralyse its desire to change things. (Mannheim 1936: 36)

Although reactions to the often dystopian experience of life after prison are varied, of those former prisoners who adhered to either the doctrinal or imagistic modes of Islamic religiosity, both would be equally likely to '[turn

their] back on everything which would shake [their] belief or paralyse [their] desire to change things'. However, those former Muslim prisoners who experienced religiosity of an imagistic mode within prison show a wider predisposition to cognitive openings (Wiktorowicz 2005) and also tend to actively seek out high arousal experiences that can provide them with 'insights' into what divine requirements are expected of them or what 'mission' they are to embark upon. It is not a surprise, thus, that among some of these former Muslim prisoners we can find strong millenarian ideas.

It is clear, from my study, that the experience of prison shapes the perception of Islam as religion. This means that former Muslim prisoners need specific support to readapt to life after prison, especially if the custodial sentence has been of short to medium duration. Islam in prison, as we have discussed in this book, is heavily influenced by emotional and cognitive experiences linked to environmental factors. The decision to introduce professional prison imams in England and Wales (Beckford et al. 2005) has been essential in maintaining and managing Muslim prisoners' faith and relationship with Islam and decreasing the level of radical Islamic dualism. However, imams employed in prisons still face difficulties and even occasional competition for authority. Yet once outside prison and beyond the reach of these professional imams, prisoners find themselves with a total lack of coordinated support within their probation programme. The experience of returning to mainstream society is unmanaged and each individual is left to his or her own survival strategies.

Facing Recruiting Rhetoric

London. I met Saeed at the usual Starbucks. Saeed, a 24-year-old of Pakistani origin and a former Muslim prisoner, had organised a meeting with a group of his friends who were expected to arrive shortly. We sat together chatting about religion as usual when his four friends entered the café premises. They were, like Saeed, British Pakistanis; however, they dressed in a western style in contrast to Saeed, who had adopted a more traditional South Asian appearance after his prison sentence. Saeed, during our meeting, had spoken for a while about this particular group of friends, who meet in a suburban London flat for the Friday prayer. About 15 individuals attend the prayer at the flat. Saeed, as many other former Muslim prisoners, found it difficult to go back to his local mosque, 'people there do not really know me, but they know my crime. I am the crime. I can

go there – but you know that they are looking at you and when you turn your back, they gossip about you and your family.’ He came to know of a person, connected to the group of four friends who joined us at Starbucks, who had organised an association to study the Qur’an and to let young second-generation Pakistanis have a space that was not controlled by the elders of their communities.

Finally, I was introduced to the four men. I knew that they were Saeed’s good friends but I had no idea of their precise role within this spontaneously constructed association. I continued to meet Saeed and the other four when possible, though I started to notice that Saeed, during my last few visits, had changed his language and style in discussing world events. Although I was acquainted with Saeed’s radical dualistic views and his black and white, so to say, presentation of life, I could appreciate that his emphasis on the ‘suffering of brothers and sisters’ became linked to ‘the need to react and retaliate’, something which was certainly new to his rhetoric. When he told me that he had seen this suffering with his own eyes, I first thought that he was referring to videos often shown on *Al-Jazeera*, a channel that he watched on his computer. In reality, I came to know that he had access to different material which he defined as being ‘much more real and uncensored’. I insisted to know where one could find such videos, expecting to receive a web link as has happened many other times in my research. I was surprised to find out that there was no web link to share, since the videos were shown at the same flat in which the religious activities took place. Perceiving my concerns even before I could express them, he stated, ‘hey I have been in prison, right? I don’t want to spend time there again. No worries: this is not what you think. It is not like anyone is asking us to go to Afghanistan; there is no recruitment or anything like that. You know what, you can come and see for yourself. I am sure that nobody will complain. I will let you know this week.’

I waited for his call. I was very sceptical that he could arrange for me to be there when the videos were shown. To my surprise, he called me and said that I was welcome. We met the day after so that he could bring me to the flat. We entered together and found two of his friends waiting for us at the door, and after having exchanged salaams, we were guided towards the meeting place. While walking, they joked about me working for MI5, but added that we probably all were. I noticed that the place was a very simple two-bedroom flat, though it had a quite spacious living room with no chairs or settees, but rather some cushions and a space in the middle where the prayers were performed. From the wall hung some Islamic paraphernalia. In the living room there were black and gold cloth wall-hangings

depicting the *ka'ba* (direction of the prayer). There were six people in attendance that day, and after having performed the prayer, we were seated in front of a TV connected to a DVD player, and a homemade DVD was played. It was edited, but no specific group was mentioned and the editing appeared to be very amateur. The comments were in English, and the video showed collections of film clips from Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and other places.

It looked like a simple documentary showing the suffering of Muslims, especially women and children. There were testimonies from women, and also young children, of atrocities and abuses committed by Israeli, American, British as well as Russian forces. There were accounts of rapes and footage, from mobile phone cameras, of the bodies of civilians killed by military strikes and operations. Images of the bloody halls of hospitals, funerals, screaming women, crying men and graveyards amongst many others were portrayed as a kind of collage taken from mainstream Western, Arab, Indian and Pakistani TV news. There was also an emphasis on prison, and I could recognise some clips from the film *Gitmo* representing the conditions of Guantanamo, as well as references in the commentary to the suffering that Muslim prisoners endure in 'corrupt' Muslim states such as Egypt. In total, this section resembled the kind of production that an organisation such as Amnesty International may have put together. However, it is notable that the narrator made some connections and references to Muslim prisoners in the West. The film ended with quotation from the Qur'an.

Many of those in attendance were crying and some were making supplications (*du'a*), but nobody was left unmoved by the video, including myself. Certainly, people who had suffered injustice themselves may have easily connected their own experience of suffering to the 'global' anguish of those men, women and children portrayed in the video. Yet the video had in itself no invitation to perpetrate violence: it did not show any insurgent action against foreign troops in Iraq or anywhere else. In other words, it was not one of those Al-Qaeda-style internet videos that, during my research, I have become familiar with. No crime was committed in that room, even according to the over-restrictive Terrorism Act 2000, and no Crown Prosecutor could have convinced a jury that the video contained radical material or that the people watching it were engaging in radical activities other than by arguing that the mere showing of war and suffering is a crime in itself.

Yet to believe, as Saeed did until the day he left the group,⁶ that the video was entirely innocent may be rather naïve. I have no problem to define the video as a cleverly composed 'emotional bomb' (Marranci 2006). The way

in which the video was organised, the manner in which the comments were made and the religiously powerful combination of verses from the Qur'an and Hadith, aimed to destabilise the autobiographical-self of the audience, and thus provoke reactions.

I did not know the audience, other than Saeed and his four friends whom I had met at the café, but I was tempted to assume that some in attendance were of a similar background to that of Saeed, although understandably he did not wish to confirm or deny it. As I have explained elsewhere (Marranci 2006), often the most powerful and cunning radical rhetoric and recruitment is not overtly violent. Rather, it attempts to provoke an even wider cognitive opening than that which existed before so that eventually a person can overcome moral questioning and suspend ethical judgement. Exposure to suffering, especially when not directly experiencing it, has a greater chance of 'radicalising' a person than any charismatic, doctrinal rhetoric (Marranci 2006, 2009).

Of course, reactions to this type of material vary widely and we can expect substantial differences between the effects that these kinds of experiences, which are more common than we may suspect, have on former Muslim prisoners. I am not surprised that Saeed, whose religiosity was certainly more linked to the doctrinal mode, decided in the end to avoid the group and look for other ways to make sense of the, often horrible, suffering that many Muslims have to bear. Someone more linked to an imagistic Islamic mode of religiosity may have reacted differently and, I suggest, may in certain circumstances accept the rhetoric of recruitment.

My research shows clearly that former Muslim prisoners are potentially *more vulnerable* to the recruiting rhetoric of extremist movements, small groups of individuals or even self-radicalisation. Some former Muslim prisoners, who had found a stable post-prison Muslim identity, revealed during interviews that they were approached by an individual who befriended them and then tried to introduce them to ideas and groups which praised 'resistance', advocated retaliation and accused other Muslims of being complacent with the 'crusaders'. Some of these former Muslim prisoners suggested that such 'talent scouts' were frequently former members of dismantled Islamist organisations such as Al Muhajiroun and Supporters of Shariah (Wiktorowicz 2005). Although I have no independent evidence to confirm or discredit such allegation, I have no doubt that the isolation, the kinds of Islamic religiosity developed within prison, the need to be accepted, as well as a more evident emotional instability due to the experience of the prison environment and the sudden loss of the 'prison ummah', makes

them easy and preferable targets of extremist exploitation. As may be expected, the great majority of former Muslim prisoners, such as my friend Saeed, after perhaps being intrigued by the newfound brothers and sisters who are so ready to accept them despite their past crimes, will eventually distance themselves from what they may recognise as ‘dodgy’ connections.

Nonetheless, a minority who typically are the most isolated, who are rejected by their own families, and who usually adhere to an imagistic mode of Islamic religiosity can be seriously at risk of exploitation. Furthermore, the deeper the crisis after leaving the ‘Muslim enclave’ in prison and enduring the post-prison isolation, the higher is the possibility that the Muslim former prisoner may see his or her life as hopeless and wasteful, and so begin to consider the ultimate reward of paradise as the only possible positive exit from such a painful emotional state. Aspirations of suicide actions, hence, can, in certain circumstances, become part of the imagination of a very small number of former Muslim prisoners. My interviews suggest that, in these cases, their imagination most often brings them to the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq. However, few are the imagined fantasies that are turned into sincerely planned plots, and fewer still are the ones that are materialised into real action, as in the case of the infamous ‘shoe bomber’.

Although there is no evidence that particular groups are targeting former Muslim prisoners in particular, it is also true that their psychological and cognitive profiles make them, to the attentive and charismatic ‘talent scout’, a perfect candidate. Certainly this can only highlight the urgent need for projects and programmes that focus on former Muslim prisoners, and also the need to educate the mainstream Muslim community about the experience of prison and the necessity of providing services and support not only within prison, but also outside it. But there is also another important element that can help to reduce, if not defuse, the risk that a minority of Muslim prisoners may be radicalised to a dangerous level: change the way in which ‘extremism’ in prison is monitored and understood.

While the Prison Service in Scotland seemed to have, at this stage, adopted the right attitude towards this issue, the English and Welsh have definitely used the wrong instruments and, as discussed in the previous chapters of this book, facilitated the spread of an imagistic mode of Islamic religiosity as well as the formation of ‘Muslim enclaves’. As we have seen, fear remains the main enemy in this case, and to induce or increase fear through a sense

of continuous surveillance or by subjecting Muslim prisoners to degrading, although legal, security practices can only result in an elevated possibility that the Muslim prisoner, once released, may fall victim to extremist organisations or individuals. If we consider what the last annual report of the HM Chief Inspector of Prison for England and Wales describes, and what my findings have revealed, we may understand the level of risk British society may face in the near future. Indeed, the report summarises the results of a survey on religion in prison as such, 'No Muslims believed complaints were sorted out fairly; fewer than a third believed staff treated them with respect; half said they had been victimised by staff; a third said that they had been victimised by other prisoners; nearly two-thirds had felt unsafe' (HM Chief Inspector of Prison for England and Wales, annual report 06/07: 27).

Conclusions

Entering prison is a traumatic event, even when it is not for the first time. The prison environment shapes a person's way of thinking, understanding and interacting because of the impact that it has on the process of emotions that we have discussed in this book. Leaving prison, as I have described in this chapter, is no less traumatic. Life after prison, after all, cannot be the same as before. For former Muslim prisoners, the lack of support, especially in the case of short sentences, is particularly evident. If former Muslim prisoners are rejected by their families, or decide not to return to them, there are high risks of reoffending, or, as discussed, that radical groups or extremists may exploit the particular religiosity that the person may have developed during incarceration. The Prison Service of England and Wales has made great efforts to reduce the risk of religious radicalisation within prison (Spalek et al. 2008), although often clear mistakes in policies and practices have actually achieved the opposite during my research. Life after prison, however, has been virtually ignored by politicians, the Prison Service and academics alike.

In this chapter, I have, through the experiences of my informants, showed the process through which some former Muslim prisoners, although in very small numbers, can become easy targets for the methodology and rhetoric of recruitment. The fact that the majority of even these former Muslim prisoners will, eventually, distance themselves from violent rhetoric of jihad does not exclude that one may decide, because of the reasons explained above, that his only option left in life is 'paradise'.

Notes

- ¹ Some prisoners are incarcerated before their children are born, or preferred not to see their own children once they were old enough to understand that the place they were visiting was prison instead of, for instance, a hospital (one of the most common excuses provided by families to children).
- ² Of course there are research and studies about probation and its aspects, but these tend to focus on specifically practical issues, such as employment, accommodation and reoffending (Worrall 1997; Statham and Whitehead 1992; Robinson 1999; Maruna and Immergeon 2004; Metcalf et al. 2001) or specific weaknesses of the parole system, such as the lack of support for prisoners, racism and so forth.
- ³ I have decided to omit any detail that may facilitate the identification of Iqbal. Because of the very small number of Muslim prisoners in Scotland and the fact that his crime had some press exposure, details of the location and other information may reveal who Iqbal in reality is.
- ⁴ *Tablighi Jama'at* or 'the congregation that conveys' is an Islamic movement that began in the early twentieth century in India. Their main aim is missionary action, particularly among the Muslim community, to encourage the correct practice of Islam (for more see Masud 1999).
- ⁵ It is important to remember that for the purposes of analysis we are unable to avoid models that are, ultimately, based on generalisations. As we know, generalisations are at risk of transforming themselves into stereotypes. Hence, we need to know that each Muslim prisoner, as each of my informants, is an individual displaying unique characteristics. There also exist, however, some patterns and recurrent traits that are based upon emotional processes described in the previous chapters. It is these recurrent traits that have helped me to develop this analysis.
- ⁶ In this case, I tried to convince Saeed to find mainstream Muslim groups that shared his views, and I also suggested that he should join mainstream associations that fight for the rights of Muslims throughout the world.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

Nearly 4 years later, on a cold day in late January 2007, the gates of the last prison I visited locked behind me. It was late evening, and the strong halogen lights on the top of the red-brick walls reflected on the thin layer of snow, highlighting the anonymous shapes of prison officers' and visitors' footprints. As usual, I breathed in the fresh air thinking that many, behind that wall, were now locked in their small cell and surrounded by a cacophony of chaotic noises: a counterpoint of voices, radio tunes, screams, cries, steps, clinking keys and clanking metal doors. It is evening in prison – the time of loneliness. I step further, watching to see if my taxi has arrived. It is not there, and I look up and catch sight of an aircraft flying high in the sky with its blinking lights contrasting against the night. I start to reflect. I have my mobile phone in one pocket and my Pocket PC in another; I see cars parked here and there, and also the advanced surveillance cameras that watch them; I think of all the advancement that this mammal called the 'human being' has been able to achieve since fire first brightened the walls of a cave – and then I turn my face towards the prison. Millennia of progress and innovation have marked human history in all fields of life, but prisons, as a kind of living fossil, are still landmarks of our urban landscape.

Prisons are proportionally more numerous today than during the Middle Ages, and detain people for longer periods.¹ Statistical projections suggest that the prison population may reach 96,000 in the United Kingdom by 2014, which means an increase of 18 per cent.² The prison population has nearly doubled in the past 20 years, even though we live in a safer society with a reduced level of crime (Carter 2003). Prisons are expensive to run. For instance, in England and Wales, the average cost per prisoner per year is £40,992.³ Despite these high costs, prison has reduced crime by only around 5 per cent during a period when overall crime fell by 30 per cent (Carter 2003). Hence, questioning not only how prison, as a social institution, is (mis)used, but also the reasons for which such a primitive and ineffective system of crime reduction is still considered the only solution,

is essential for today's social scientists (Sykes 1958; Foucault 1977; Cohen 1985). As we have seen in this book, alongside the general increase of prison population, we have witnessed a surprising 141 per cent increase in the number of Muslim prisoners during the past 10 years. This increase was of little interest to the general public and the mass media until after 9/11 and the terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom. During the last 7 years, topics related to the subject of Muslims in prison have occupied progressively more space on newspapers, radio and TV programmes, and parliamentary debate. However, when I began my research there was virtually no academic work devoted to it, and few studies are available even today (see Introduction and Chapter 2).

For this reason, in this book I have aimed to offer, through the analysis of my 4 years of in-depth fieldwork conducted both within and outside prison, an understanding of the reasons for which today more Muslims are detained in prison (Chapter 3); how Muslim prisoners experience prison (Chapter 4); how such experience influences their 'making sense' of Islam in prison, and the consequent development of a prison Islam (Chapter 5); the process through which some Muslim prisoners may adhere to unorthodox and emotional interpretations of Islam that are based on spontaneous exegetical reflections (Chapter 6); and finally the difficulties, isolation and the lack of support that former Muslim prisoners experience and the risks that they, and consequently our societies, may face as far as reoffending and terrorism are concerned (Chapter 7). Muslims in prison can be studied in several different ways. As Spalek (2002) has noticed, criminologists (but we can also add sociologists and psychologists) have traditionally focused on 'ethnicity' rather than religion. At the same time, however, it was taken for granted that the majority of Asians were Muslim. Here lies the reason for which Spalek has invited scholars to reconsider the role of religion. Nonetheless, as we have discussed in Chapter 2 through the example of Macey's research and analysis (2007, 2002, 1999a and 1999b), there is risk involved in focusing on religion, seen as a powerful cultural system of symbols which, in Geertzian terms (1973), is a 'control mechanism – plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call "programs") – for governing [human] behavior' (1973: 44). From this perspective, the master-question 'what role has Islam in . . .?' is fundamental to understanding the reasons behind the high numbers of Muslims in prison and the increase of criminality among Muslims, especially those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins.

I have explained in the Introduction that this approach leads to what Mamdani has defined as 'Culture Talk' (Mamdani 2004), in which 'every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as

a consequence of the essence' (2004: 18). In this book, I have adopted a different view, and as an anthropologist advocating in my work that anthropology must rediscover the 'anthropos' (Marranci 2008b, 2009), and suggested that we should start not from Islam (or even ethnicity or culture), but rather from those individuals whom I have met, interacted with, observed and tried to understand. They are not symbols or made by symbols. They have bones, flesh, veins and brains. They are alive and interact with not only others but also the surrounding environment, and are thus affected by it. They can laugh, cry, blush, or display many other emotions, consciously or unconsciously, remember events and express their identities. This is of course because they have a brain that is alive and functioning. Islam cannot make sense to Iqbal if, for instance, he lacked essential cognitive abilities or a neurological problem forced him to forget in seconds what he had just learnt. For this reason, in this book we have started our journey outside prison (Chapter 3) by discussing the difficult socio-economic, yet also emotional, environment in which many Muslims in the United Kingdom live today.

The overall socio-economic status of Muslims, in particular when of Asian, Black Caribbean and Black extraction, has, in all aspects, worsened since the 1990s (Dobbs et al. 2006). Geographically, Muslim communities tend to live in the most deprived areas of the most densely populated cities in the United Kingdom. Although reading prison statistics may give the impression that there exists an increase of 'Muslim crimes', in reality an attentive comparative statistical approach reveals that the higher proportion of Muslims incarcerated are the result of independent, rather than dependent, variables. As seen in Chapter 3, Muslims in the United Kingdom have a young population, and criminological research has demonstrated that the young age of a population has a great impact upon offences and incarceration rates (Webster 1997; Spalek 2002). Leaving aside national statistics concerning Muslims in prison and examining some British locations in which the Muslim and non-Muslim population are nearly equal, we may observe that the imprisonment rate (see Chapter 3) is virtually the same for both the groups. Therefore, we can only reject suggestions, such as that which Macey (2002) proposed, that 'believing in Islam' exposes Muslims to social and economic disadvantage as well as increases the risk of their committing crimes. In reality, as I have explained in Chapter 3, British Muslims born of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian or Arab origins are, despite numerous political and journalistic claims, 'integrating' within British society. Integration is local, and in many cases this means that these young people integrate into troubled areas which are affected by drugs, gang

culture, prostitution and so forth. Difficult urban spaces have an impact upon the levels of criminal behaviour among the general population. Muslims tend, however, to be more vulnerable because of the rejection that they often receive from mainstream society because of their ethnic, or religious, identities.

Young Muslims also face difficulties within their own ethnic communities. Research, in addition to my own (Din 2006), has documented how a widening generation gap is turning into a generational conflict. This is especially the case among South Asians, where parents and grandparents struggle to maintain the cultural traditions of the group as well as traditional ways of teaching Islam. At the same time, they have difficulties in understanding their children and grandchildren, not only because they speak English more than their ancestral language, but also because the younger generations use slang and idioms that remain beyond the grasp of their elders. Yet the older generations still control the main cultural and religious spaces, leaving the young with very few spaces to express themselves or to have opportunities for leadership. Unsurprisingly, in a majority of cases interest in attending the 'madrasa', or even the practice of Islam beyond major festivities and rituals, ceases in early adolescence. We have seen that these emotional frustrations, lack of control and conflict with elder members of the community are, among many others, factors that may induce existential fear, and existential fear may in turn facilitate crime.

Many of us have imagined prison, watched prison films, or are aware of the existence of one nearby. Few, fortunately, have experienced one. No prisoner enters prison without his or her baggage of stereotypes and images, and rarely does prison match the expectations. Today prisons in the United Kingdom are far better than they were 30 years ago, and more inspections are carried out that cover all areas of detention. Nonetheless, some aspects of prison remain unchanged because of the nature of this institution. In Chapter 4, we start to observe the lives of Muslim prisoners from their first steps inside. As in the rest of this book, we observe them as human beings, whom in this case 'feel to be Muslims' (Marranci 2006). The prison environment affects them in the same way that it would any other person, as many elements of psychology, emotions and neurocognitive factors are universal. For this reason, in Chapter 4, we have first discussed the process of adaptation to prison and the difficulties involved. Prison is a restricted environment in which people cannot fully control their lives or make even basic decisions. Indeed, as such, prison is an anomaly in the human condition. This affects both the social and emotional dimensions, and consequently how the autobiographical-self perceives the prison

environment and makes it a part of its memory. These physical, cognitive and psychological elements have consequences for how Muslim prisoners 'feel to be' Muslim, and hence make sense of Islam as a religion.

We have noticed how Islamic rituals and practices acquire an extra layer of meaning that helps Muslim prisoners to survive within the prison environment as well as manage psychological changes. Many variables affect the relationship between prisoners, and ethnicity is surely one of the most powerful. Yet we have noticed that Islam has been used by prisoners to cross such ethnic boundaries, especially in the case of real or perceived threats. Prisoners have also, consciously or unconsciously depending upon the case, capitalised upon Islam to reform links with family, or to reduce the impact that the lack of family contact has on their lives. In the case of female Muslim prisoners, the majority of whom are mothers, separation from children adds a great burden to their imprisonment. Through rediscovering or converting to Islam, some of the female prisoners I met wished to express their intention of becoming 'good mothers' or 'good examples' for their children. Islam has surely helped these women, as also the young offenders, to socialise and to survive the process of adaptation to prison.

All categories of Muslim prisoners are today under a stronger level of institutionalised surveillance. Yet it is the distrust that many face from some prison officers and non-Muslim prisoners that make Muslim prisoners, in general, feel more insecure within prison. My research has highlighted serious problems of discrimination based mainly upon religious and political victimisation. Adopting visibly religious behaviour or converting to Islam can mean an increase in distrust from some sectors of the prison and especially from fellow inmates. This has, as we have seen, a serious impact on how Islam, as religion, is understood and practised within prison and this increases the risk of certain radical groups exploiting former Muslim prisoners' resentment. However, mostly concealed from the eyes of both prison authorities and scholars is the Muslim-to-Muslim bullying that affects some prisons. We have, among the other forms of bullying, discussed the often-unheard case of Shi'a Muslim prisoners. Although few in number, these prisoners suffer not only from the same problems as any other prisoner, but also from in-group discrimination and bullying – especially since the majority of Muslim prisoners are Sunni and the Prison Service employs Sunni imams and, though indirectly, 'sponsors' Sunni Islam.

In the previous chapters of this book, we have observed that the majority of Muslim prisoners have discontinued practising Islam since their teenage years. Yet in many cases, after a remarkably short period in prison, they rediscover Islam as religion. In Chapter 5, we have seen that Muslims can

emphasise their religion within prison for many reasons, some of which can be strategic. Nonetheless, all the different modalities of rediscovering Islam within prison share a common origin within emotional processes. I have explained the reasons for which a constructivist approach may not be useful in understanding Islam in prison, and instead I have suggested that a better solution is to focus on the relationship between brain and environment and emotion. For this reason, in Chapter 5, starting from Damasio's distinction between emotions and feelings, we have observed how feelings are essential to maintain an autobiographical-self and that what we call 'faith' is part of such a process. The most common emotion found in prison is certainly fear, which of course induces powerful feelings. Faith can be experienced in different ways, and I have suggested that the emotion of fear, so common among prisoners, has facilitated the experience of 'wonder' for some. It is through wonder that some Muslim prisoners rediscover Islam. However, many more, through the shocking experience of prison, rediscover Islam through a cognitive opening that, as discussed in Chapter 6, can easily lead to what Whitehouse (2004) has called spontaneous exegetical reflection. In Chapter 5, we have also noticed that social restrictions, the forced contact with others and the need to control a challenging environment facilitate simplifications, so that stereotypes, as dualistic thinking, are extremely common. I have then explained how this common way of making sense of reality can, in certain circumstances, become particularly radical. Radical dualism is dogmatic and aggressive in its expression. I have discussed how this *forma mentis* can develop without an actual indoctrination or external influence, such as radical literature or other material.

The question of whether Muslim prisoners are radicalising in prison is one that journalists, politicians, the police and the Prison Services have asked during my research. As I have explained in the Introduction, the question in itself has little meaning because it demands a 'yes' or 'no' answer. The reason for this may be found in the widespread idea that 'extremism', 'fundamentalism' and 'radicalism' are a sort of virus that can infect and spread. The etiology and the epidemiology are also simple: this 'virus' spreads through exposure to cultural objects (books, cassettes with sermons, pamphlets and so forth) and ideas transmitted by the various 'carriers'. Although cultural objects and ideas may play a role, this is, contrary to expectations, secondary. Indeed, 'radicalisation' is a process, not a 'virus'. As with any processes, several variables are at stake and we have analysed them in Chapter 6.⁴ We have discussed how some Muslim prisoners develop during their incarceration, as a reaction to the prison environment

and the perception that they are victims of social injustice, what I have called a 'feeling of dignity' and an 'ethos of justice'. Indeed, as Toch (1975) has explained, all prisoners, to preserve their identity, in one way or another reject their presence in prison as unjust.

In the case of some Muslim prisoners (though certainly not the majority), this also means to reject the 'authority' of the prison over them. All Muslim prisoners, of course, consider themselves to be Allah's slaves. However, some extend this reasoning beyond the theological domain and conclude that they have only one master, Allah, and thus reject any human authority, including that of the prison imam. Indeed, they would argue that since authority within prison is based on human rules for the benefit of humans, it is 'a-moral' and should be rejected. Therefore, tawhid, the main pillar of Islam declaring the oneness of God and the essence of faith for any Muslim, is here transformed from a theological tenet into an ideological tool of survival and a mechanism of maintaining one's own autobiographical-self and sense of dignity.

The ideology of tawhid is the result, in this case, of prison dynamics rather than indoctrination or reading material. Indeed, the great majority of those of my respondents who adhered to the ideology of tawhid had never read ibn Taymiyah, Sayyid Qutb or similar authors. It is also interesting to note that, in a majority of cases, it was not the most vulnerable of prisoners to adopt an ideology of tawhid, but rather those whose expectations of how they should be treated (especially in reference to their religious identity) were most violated by the prison environment. It is the contradiction, between a prisoner's expectations and the reality of prison that nourishes the 'defensive' mechanism that we have referred to as the ideology of tawhid.

In Chapter 6, we have seen that an ideology of tawhid can become part of a more complex process: the shift from a doctrinal mode of Islamic religiosity to an imagistic one. Whitehouse (2004) has explained religious transmission through a cognitive theory known as 'modes of religiosity'. Doctrinal modes of religiosity, such as the main monotheistic religions, are based upon repetition in their rituals and are structured around complex theological teachings that induce a low level of arousal. By contrast, religions based on an imagistic mode (e.g. some African tribal religions or Cargo rituals in Papua New Guinea) have a low transmissive frequency, a high level of arousal and are based on episodic memory, meaning in this case that the meaning of rituals are derived from personal, and often traumatic, experiences (e.g. initiations). Surely, even for those who have been in prison before, imprisonment is a distressing event marked by several,

more or less traumatic, rituals. In some cases this facilitates not only cognitive openings as discussed in Chapter 5, but also spontaneous exegetical reflection in which the individual is able to extrapolate, as an effect of episodic memory, meaningful personal eschatology which however, as far as Islam is concerned, can antagonise the orthodox doctrinal mode of Islamic religiosity.

An imagistic mode of religiosity may not only display characteristics that others might define as ‘fanaticism’ or ‘extremism’, but because of its particular nature, it may also incline towards violence. Imams, including the prison imam, are used to operating within the ‘doctrinal mode’ and the Prison Service tends to sponsor an even more ‘orthodox’, controlled and structured version of Islam than what exists outside. As discussed in the Introduction, unfortunately instead of taking the right steps to modify those elements that can facilitate the development of an imagistic mode of Islamic religiosity in prison, the English and Welsh Prison Service is employing counterproductive security policies. The British government, with plans such as that of isolating some Muslim prisoners in special prisons, can provide an even more fertile ground for new and more powerful imagistic modes of Islamic religiosity.

The consequences of what we have discussed above reach much further than the prison gates. Other than with few exceptions, a person enters prison with the hope of someday leaving. For Muslim prisoners, who are often committed to sentences of short to medium duration, the passage from captivity to liberty is often no less traumatic than imprisonment itself. In Chapter 7, we have followed the post-incarceration experiences of some of my respondents. While the government, and consequently the Prison Service, displays ardent concern about security and extremism within prison, the destiny of former Muslim prisoners seems to be of no interest, and this indifference has possible unfortunate consequences. Indeed, if the effects of the prison environment and the related issues we have discussed in this book are to become a potential threat, it will be so outside prison rather than in it. Of course, the danger is limited, as I have explained, but as we also know, it takes only a few committed individuals to endanger the lives of many. Former Muslim prisoners lacking much needed support from relatives or the State will rarely find it within their own Muslim community, which today, as my research has shown, is still prone to reject them rather than address their needs. However, other groups, politicised and radical in their interpretation of Islam, are likely to sometimes offer what the mainstream community and the State fail to provide. Though many of the Muslim prisoners who enter radical organisations voluntarily, by chance,

or because of being actively recruited, later go on to reject them. Yet a small number, depending upon their experience of prison, how they developed their ‘prison Islam’ and the degree of isolation they endured, may join and possibly even be persuaded to commit worse crimes than before, including terrorism.

This book has shown that the high rate of Muslims detained is a clear result of political failure to address those socio-economic and educational problems that an increasing number of young Muslims face. The increasingly common trend of adducing the disadvantaged condition of many UK Muslims to ‘Islam’ and ‘Islamic culture’ only adds to distrust of political power. Muslims are integrated – but of course, they are integrated within the poorest and most disadvantaged suburbs in the nation. More Muslims, if problems are not addressed (or continue to be addressed through patronising instead of empowering means), will end in prison. As this book has strongly reaffirmed, Muslim prisoners are human beings and are thus affected by the environment, in this case prison, through emotions. I have tried to make explicit the dynamics that exist within prison as far as Islam is concerned, and today, indeed, we can speak of the existence of a ‘prison Islam’. Some of the processes, such as faith, ideology and fear, are inevitable in prison – and not just in the case of Muslim prisoners – but they can be understood and managed in a positive way. I hope that this book may contribute to such a challenging aim.

Notes

¹ Lord Carter’s Review of Prisons, Securing the Future, December 2007.

² Ministry of Justice Statistical Bulletin (2008), *Prison Population Projections, England and Wales, 2008–2015*.

³ Hansard, House of Commons written answers, 18 April 2006.

⁴ It is vital to remember that, although the chapter focuses on Muslims for obvious reasons, the essence of the process described is not limited to either Muslims or religion.

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